

Nathaniel B. Jones

GREEK
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ROMAN
WORLD

Painting, Ethics, and Aesthetics in Rome



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Painting, Ethics, and Aesthetics in Rome

In the first centuries BCE and CE, Roman wall painters frequently placed representations of works of art, especially panel paintings, within their own mural compositions. Nathaniel B. Jones argues that the depiction of panel painting within mural ensembles functioned as a meta-pictorial reflection on the practice and status of painting itself. This phenomenon provides crucial visual evidence for both the reception of Greek culture and the interconnected ethical and aesthetic values of art in the Roman world. Roman meta-pictures, this book reveals, not only navigated social debates on the production and consumption of art, but also created space on the Roman wall for new modes of expression relating to pictorial genres, the role of medium in artistic practice, and the history of painting. Richly illustrated, the volume will be important for anyone interested in the social, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of artworks, in the ancient Mediterranean and beyond.

NATHANIEL B. JONES is Assistant Professor of Art History and Archaeology at Washington University in St. Louis. His research interests include painting, collecting practices, and art-historical thought in Greco-Roman antiquity.

GREEK CULTURE IN THE ROMAN WORLD

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To my family

Contents

List of Figures [page viii]

List of Plates [xiv]

Acknowledgments [xvi]

List of Abbreviations [xviii]

Introduction: The Painting of Painting in Ancient Rome [1]

1 Winckelmann and the Cultural Dynamics of Painting [9]

2 Disrupting the Frame [47]

3 The Ethics and Politics of Art [93]

4 Transparent and Opaque: Medium and Materiality on the Roman Wall [137]

5 Paradigms, Ensembles, and Anachronisms [179]

Epilogue: Reflection and Reflexivity [230]

Bibliography [235]

Index [283]

The plate section can be found between pp. 142 and 143.

Figures

- I.1 Painted Staircase from the Domus Augustana, Palatine Hill, Rome, late first century CE. Watercolor, likely by Francesco Bartoli. Eton College Library, Topham Collection. ECL-TP.16–2012. Photo: by Permission of the Provost and Fellows of Eton College. [page 2]
- 1.1 Investment of a Priestess, from the Palestra, Insula Orientalis, Herculaneum, mid-first century CE. MANN 9022. Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY. [13]
- 1.2 Actor King, from the Palestra, Insula Orientalis, Herculaneum, mid-first century CE. MANN 9019. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY. [14]
- 1.3 Engraving of the Actor King, after *Antichità di Ercolano esposte*, vol. 4, 195: pl. 51. [17]
- 1.4 *Knucklebones Players*, painting on marble signed by Alexandros the Athenian, first century BCE to first century CE. MANN 9562. Photo: Luigi Spina/Electa/Mondadori Portfolio/Getty Images. [23]
- 1.5 Atrium and Fauces, Samnite House, Herculaneum, late second to early first century BCE. Photo: DeAgostini/Getty Images. [41]
- 1.6 Red Room, Augustan Villa at Boscotrecase, late first century BCE. MANN 147501. Photo: Luigi Spina/Electa/Mondadori Portfolio/Getty Images. [43]
- 1.7 Ixion Room, House of the Vettii, Pompeii, late first century CE. Photo: Hulton Archive/Getty Images. [44]
- 2.1 Fresco from Room g, Villa of the Papyri, Herculaneum, mid-first century BCE. Drawing by Allison Méndez. [51]
- 2.2 Room 4, Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, mid-first century BCE. Photo: Mario Laporta/AFP/Getty Images. [53]
- 2.3 Diego Velázquez, *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, ca.1618–1620. National Gallery. Photo © National Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY. [56]

- 2.4 Hieronymus Francken II and Jan Breughel I, *The Archdukes Albert and Isabella in a Cabinet of Curiosities*, ca.1621–1623. Walters Art Museum 37.2010. Photo: Walters Art Museum. [57]
- 2.5 Attic Black-Figure Amphora by Exekias, mid- to late sixth century BCE. Vatican Museums. Photo: DEA Picture Library/De Agostini/Getty Images. [58]
- 2.6 Attic Red-Figure Kylix attributed to the Foundry Painter, early fifth century BCE. Berlin Antikensammlungen F2294. Photo Johannes Laurentius, Staatliche Museen, Berlin/Art Resource, NY. [59]
- 2.7 Apulian Red-Figure Krater, mid-fourth century BCE. Metropolitan Museum of Art 50.11.4. Photo: metmuseum.org. [61]
- 2.8 Ikarios Relief, first century CE. British Museum 1805,0703.123. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum. [63]
- 2.9 a) Head of Octavian, b) Temple and Cult Statue of Divus Iulius, Denarius, 36 BCE (RRC 540/2). British Museum 2002,0102.4859. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum. [64]
- 2.10 Sardonyx Cameo of Livia with a bust of the deified Augustus, after 14 CE. Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum IXa95. Photo: KHM Museumsverband. [66]
- 2.11 Attack of the Laestrygonians, Odyssey Landscapes, Esquiline Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE. Biblioteca Apostolica, Vatican Museums. Photo: De Agostini/Getty Images. [68]
- 2.12 Exedra Y, House of the Epigrams, Pompeii (V.1.18), mid- to late first century BCE. After Mau 1882: pl. 4. [70]
- 2.13 Triptych with Portrait of a Man, Isis, and Serapis, from Egypt, late second century CE. J. Paul Getty Museum 74 AP 20–22. Photo courtesy of the Getty Open Content Program. [72]
- 2.14 Portrait from the House of Terentius Neo, Pompeii (VII.2.6), mid- to late first century CE. MANN 9058. Photo: Fine Art Images/Heritage Images/Getty Images. [76]
- 2.15 Pseudo-*tablinum*, House of the Great Altar, Pompeii (VI.16.15), mid- to late first century CE. Photo: Peter Grunwald, D-DAI-Z 78.1239. [78]
- 2.16 Room 17, House of the Cryptoporticus, Pompeii (I.6.2), mid- to late first century BCE. After Spinazzola 1953: pl. 20. [79]

- 2.17 Oecus 3, left wall, House of Obellius Firmus, Pompeii (IX.14.4), mid- to late first century BCE. Photo: H. Koppermann, D-DAI-ROM 60.94. [80]
- 2.18 House of the Vestals, Pompeii (VI.1.7), mid- to late first century CE. Designed by Giuseppe Chiantarelli 1802, engraved by Carlo Cataneo. After *Gli ornati delle pareti ed i pavimenti delle stanze dell'antica Pompei incisi in rame*, 1838: pl. 5. [82]
- 2.19 Room of Achilles on Skyros, ceiling decoration, Domus Aurea, Rome, ca. 64–68 CE. Photo: Stefano Montesi/Corbis via Getty Images. [83]
- 2.20 Room 20, floor mosaic, House of the Labyrinth, Pompeii (VI.11.10), mid- to late first century BCE. Photo: E. Pernice, D-DAI-ROM 40.332. [84]
- 2.21 Oecus 3, rear wall, House of Obellius Firmus, Pompeii (IX.14.4), mid- to late first century BCE. Photo: H. Koppermann, D-DAI-ROM 60.95. [86]
- 2.22 Decorated sarcophagus with a painter's workshop, from Panticapaeum, first century CE. St. Petersburg, State Hermitage, Kerch Collection Π.1899–81. Photo: Yuri Molodkovets/The State Hermitage Museum. [89]
- 2.23 Fresco from Room 19, House of the Surgeon, Pompeii (VI.1.10), mid- to late first century CE. MANN 9018. Photo: DEA/L. Pedicini/De Agostini/Getty Images. [90]
- 3.1 Tetrastyle *Oecus*, House of Augustus, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE. Photo: Eric Vandeville/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images. [99]
- 3.2 Lower *Cubiculum*, House of Augustus, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE. Photo: Eric Vandeville/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images. [100]
- 3.3 Frieze from the *Columbarium* of the Statilii, Esquiline Hill, Rome, late first century BCE to early first century CE. Museo Nazionale Romano Palazzo Massimo. Photo: Ann Ronan Pictures/Print Collector/Getty Images. [102]
- 3.4 Temple of Apollo, Pompeii (VII.7.32), mid-first century CE. After Mazois 1838: pl. 19. [104]
- 3.5 Painting from the portico of the Temple of Apollo, Pompeii (VII.7.32), mid-first century CE. Lithograph after Raoul-Rochette 1844–53: pl. 8. [105]
- 3.6 Room 4, House of Livia, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE. DAIR Archivio VII-69–004. [107]

- 3.7 Palestrina Nile Mosaic, late second to early first century BCE.
Photo: Nimatallah/Art Resource, NY. [111]
- 3.8 *Cubiculum* M, detail of rear wall, Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, mid-first century BCE. Metropolitan Museum of Art 03.14.13a–g. Photo: metmuseum.org. [128]
- 3.9 Tomb chamber, Pyramid of Gaius Cestius, Rome, late first century BCE. Photo: DeAgostini/Getty Images. [131]
- 3.10 Royal box, theater at Herodium, Judea, late first century BCE.
Photo: Tal-rogovski, The Herodium Expedition, The Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. [134]
- 3.11 Detail, royal box, theater at Herodium, Judea, late first century BCE. Photo: G. Laron. The Herodium Expedition, The Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. [135]
- 4.1 *Tablinum*, House of Livia, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE. Lithograph of right wall by Gregorio Mariani, 1871. After *Monumenti Inediti* vol. 11, 1880: pl. 22. [139]
- 4.2 Room 22, House of the Cryptoporticus, Pompeii (I.6.2), mid- to late first century BCE. After Spinazzola 1953: pl. 21. [142]
- 4.3 Black room, Villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscoreale, late first century BCE. Metropolitan Museum of Art 20.192.1. Photo: metmuseum.org. [149]
- 4.4 *Tablinum* 92, Praedia of Julia Felix, Pompeii (II.4.3), mid- to late first century CE. MANN 8598. Photo: Mondadori Portfolio/Getty Images. [150]
- 4.5 *Cubiculum* 46, House of the Labyrinth. Pompeii (VI.11.10), mid-first century BCE. Photo: DeAgostini/Getty Images. [151]
- 4.6 Room 2, House of the Griffins. Rome, Palatine Hill, early first century BCE. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY. [161]
- 4.7 Room 23, Villa A (Poppea) at Oplontis, mid-first century BCE. Photo: Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali/Art Resource, NY. [162]
- 4.8 Detail, Lower *Cubiculum*, House of Augustus, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE. Photo: Eric Vandeville/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images. [167]
- 4.9 Stele of Hegeso, late fifth century BCE. Athens, National Archaeological Museum 3624. Photo: Nimatallah/Art Resource, NY. [170]

- 4.10 Apulian Red-Figure Volute Krater, attributed the Iliupersis Painter, mid-fourth century BCE. London, British Museum 1849,0518.4. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum. [171]
- 4.11 Thetis receives the arms of Achilles, from Pompeii (IX.1.7), mid-first century CE. MANN 9529. Photo: Luigi Spina/Electa/Mondadori Portfolio/Getty Images. [174]
- 4.12 Narcissus, *biclinium*, House of Octavius Quartio, Pompeii (II.2.2), mid-first century CE. Photo: DeAgostini/Getty Images. [176]
- 4.13 Diana and Actaeon, garden, House of Octavius Quartio, Pompeii (II.2.2), mid-first century CE. Drawing by Allison Méndez. [177]
- 5.1 *Tablinum*, House of Livia, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE. Drawing of Io and Argus panel by A. Sikkard. DAIR Archivio A-VII-69-009. [183]
- 5.2 *Tablinum*, House of Livia, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE. Drawing of Polyphemus and Galatea panel by A. Sikkard. DAIR Archivio A-VII-69-010. [184]
- 5.3 Io and Argus, House of Meleager, Pompeii (VI.9.2,13), mid- to late first century CE. MANN 9556. Photo Scala/Art Resource, NY. [186]
- 5.4 Io and Argus, drawing of a Lucanian Amphora attributed to the Choephoroi Painter, mid-fourth century BCE. Formerly Coghill Collection, current location unknown. After Lenormant and de Witte, *Élite des monuments céramographiques*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1844), pl. 26. [187]
- 5.5 Io's Arrival in Egypt, House of the Duke d'Aumale (VI.7.15), Pompeii, mid- to late first century CE. MANN 9555. Photo: DEA/G. Dagli Orti/De Agostini/Getty Images. [188]
- 5.6 Polyphemus and Galatea, Villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscotrecase, late first century BCE. Metropolitan Museum of Art 20.192.17. Photo: metmuseum.org. [191]
- 5.7 Fall of Icarus, Room A, Villa Imperiale di Pompeii, early first century CE. Photo: Peter Grunwald, D-DAI-Z 83.3357. [199]
- 5.8 Theseus and the Minotaur, Room A, Villa Imperiale di Pompeii, early first century CE. Photo: Peter Grunwald, D-DAI-Z 83.3353. [200]

- 5.9 Phaedra and Nurse, Room E, House of Jason, Pompeii (IX.5.18), mid-first century CE. MANN 114322. Photo: Luigi Spina/Electa/Mondadori Portfolio/Getty Images. [\[202\]](#)
- 5.10 Helen and Paris, Room E, House of Jason, Pompeii (IX.5.18), mid-first century CE. MANN 114321. Photo: Luigi Spina/Electa/Mondadori Portfolio/Getty Images. [\[203\]](#)
- 5.11 Detail of white-ground panel with Zeus, *Cubiculum* D, Villa della Farnesina, Rome, late first century BCE. Museo Nazionale Romano Palazzo Massimo. Photo: C. Rossa, D-DAI-ROM 77.1297. [\[209\]](#)
- 5.12 White-ground bobbin by the Penthesilea Painter, mid-fifth century BCE. Metropolitan Museum of Art 28.167. Photo: metmuseum.org. [\[210\]](#)
- 5.13 Detail of fictive panel with musicians, *Cubiculum* B, Villa della Farnesina, Rome, late first century BCE. Museo Nazionale Romano Palazzo Massimo. Photo: C. Rossa, D-DAI-ROM 77.1380 [\[211\]](#)
- 5.14 White-ground lekythos, attributed to the Achilles Painter, mid-fifth century BCE. Munich Antikensammlung Schoen 80. [\[212\]](#)
- 5.15 Room 5, House of the Orchard, Pompeii (1.9.5), early to mid-first century CE. Photo: H. Koppermann, D-DAI-ROM 66.2262. [\[215\]](#)
- 5.16 Relief plaque with portico, from Capua, first century BCE. MANN 6759. Photo: C. Rossa, D-DAI-ROM 76.1093. [\[219\]](#)
- 5.17 Terracotta plaque with portico, first century CE. MFA Boston 03.885. Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. [\[220\]](#)
- 5.18 Hall of the Colossus, Forum of Augustus, Rome, late first century BCE. Photo: H. Schwanke, D-DAI-ROM 82.875. [\[225\]](#)
- E.1 *Trafalgar Square*. Piet Mondrian, 1939–1943. Museum of Modern Art 510.1964. Photo © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by Scala/Art Resource, NY. [\[231\]](#)
- E.2 Drawing on celluloid of Aphrodite, Eros, and attendant from *Cubiculum* B, Villa della Farnesina. Gregorio Mariani, late nineteenth century. DAIR Archivio A-VII-69–028. [\[232\]](#)

Plates

- 1 *Cubiculum* M, Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, mid-first century BCE. Metropolitan Museum of Art 03.14.13a–g. Photo: metmuseum.org.
- 2 Room of the Mysteries, Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, mid-first century BCE. Photo: Leisa Tyler/LightRocket via Getty Images.
- 3 *Tablinum*, House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii (V.4.a), early to mid-first century CE. Photo: DeAgostini/Getty Images.
- 4 Room of the Masks, House of Augustus, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE. Photo: DeAgostini/Getty Images.
- 5 Upper *Cubiculum*, House of Augustus, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE. Photo: Alberto Pizzoli/AFP/Getty Images.
- 6 Aula Isiaca, Palatine Hill, Rome, late first century BCE. Watercolor, likely by F. Bartoli, Topham Collection, Eton College Library, ECL-TP.3–2012. Photo: by permission of the Provost and Fellows of Eton College.
- 7 *Tablinum*, House of Livia, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE. Photo: Giorgio Cosulich/Getty Images.
- 8 *Cubiculum* E, Villa della Farnesina, Rome, late first century BCE. Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.
- 9 Painting from a villa near Portici, late first century BCE. MANN 8593, 9194, 9413, 9864. Photo: Luigi Spina/Electa/Mondadori Portfolio/Getty Images.
- 10 Garden Room, Villa of Livia at Prima porta, late first century BCE. Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo. Photo: Vanni Archive/Art Resource, NY
- 11 Room 32, House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii (VI.17.42), early first century CE. Photo: DEA/L. Pedicini/De Agostini/Getty Images.
- 12 Back wall of the garden, House of the Marine Venus, Pompeii (II.3.3), mid-first century CE. Photo: Carlo Hermann/Pacific Press/LightRocket via Getty Images.

- 13 Painting from Pompeii VI.17.41, mid- to late first century BCE. MANN 8594. Photo: Luigi Spina/Electa/Mondadori Portfolio/Getty Images.
- 14 *Cubiculum* B, left wall, Villa della Farnesina, Rome, late first century BCE. Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo. Photo: DeAgostini/Getty Images.
- 15 *Cubiculum* B, alcove wall, Villa della Farnesina, Rome, late first century BCE. Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

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Abbreviations

Where possible, abbreviations of ancient authors and texts are those of S. Hornblower, A. Spawforth, and E. Eidinow (eds.) (2012), *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th edn, Oxford.

ABV	Beazley, J.D. (1956). <i>Attic Black Figure Vase Painters</i> . Oxford.
AdE	(1757–1792). <i>Le antichità di Ercolano esposte</i> . 8 vols. Naples.
ARV ²	Beazley, J.D. (1963). <i>Attic Red Figure Vase Painters</i> . 2nd edn. Oxford.
CIL	(1853–). <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> . 17 vols. Berlin.
DNO	Kansteiner, S., Hallof, K., Lehmann, L., Seidensticker, B., and Stemmer, K. (eds.) (2014). <i>Der neue Overbeck: Die antiken Schriftquellen zu den bildenden Künsten der Griechen</i> . 5 vols. Berlin.
EAA	(1958–1966). <i>Enciclopedia dell'arte antica, Classica e Orientale</i> . 7 vols. Rome.
ID	Dürnbach, F., et al. (1926–2008). <i>Inscriptions de Délos</i> . 7 vols. Paris.
LIMC	(1981–2009). <i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> . 8 vols. Zürich.
LSJ	H.G. Liddel, R.S. Scott, H.S. Jones, and R. MacKenzie (eds.) (1996). <i>A Greek-English Lexicon, With a Revised Supplement</i> . Oxford.
LTUR	Steinby, E.M. (1993–2000). <i>Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae</i> . 6 vols. Rome.
<i>Monumenti inediti</i>	Instituto di corrispondenza archeologica/Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Rom (1829–1891). <i>Monumenti inediti</i> = <i>Monuments inédits</i> . 12 vols. and suppl. Rome, Paris.
OLD	(2012). <i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i> . Oxford.
ORF	Malcovati, H. (1976). <i>Oratorum Romanorum Fragmenta</i> . 4th edn. Turin.
PPM	Caratelli, G.P. (ed.) (1990–2003). <i>Pompei: pitture e mosaici</i> . 10 vols. and suppl. Rome.
RE	Pauly, A.F. and G. Wissowa, et al. eds. (1894–1980). <i>Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> . Stuttgart.
TLG	(1996–) <i>Thesaurus Linguae Graecae</i> . Irvine.
TLL	(1900–) <i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i> . Leipzig.

Introduction: The Painting of Painting in Ancient Rome

This is a book about paintings of paintings. The physical paintings discussed here are murals. The depicted paintings, however, are painted panels – independent, portable paintings executed on wood, stone, or other material supports. This apparently simple pictorial conceit – the representation of representations – seems to have first appeared in Roman wall painting during the first half of the first century BCE; it would remain a common motif for more than a century. Such paintings of paintings were executed in Italy and beyond, and the breadth of their production elides traditional divisions within the study of Roman wall painting, traversing chronological boundaries between styles, adumbrating the public and private spheres, and appealing to both members of the elite and to the everyday Roman.

A watercolor documenting a now-lost painting unearthed during the early eighteenth-century excavations on the Palatine Hill in Rome helps to elucidate the power of this conceit (Figure I.1).¹ The image purports to show a room from the palace of Domitian, built at the end of the first century CE, after the largest and most cohesive surviving corpus of Roman wall painting, in the houses and villas of Campania, was covered over by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE. It depicts a section view of a staircase and a mural, which in turn shows a combination of architectural forms, including columns on projecting podia and a gently arcuated *aedicula* opening on to a colonnade; decorative motifs such as stylized candelabra and acanthus scrolls; human and animal figures; and, finally, depictions of artworks. The latter category includes both freestanding and relief architectural sculpture and several framed, hanging panel paintings, with a particularly prominent example in the center of the drawing.

¹ See Ashby 1914: 60, no. 16; cf. Hülsen 1895: 265; Leach 2004: 267, fig. 200. This is one of four representations of the same staircase, including a plan, now in the Topham collection at Eton. Cf. Ashby 1914: 61, nos. 17–18. Ashby 1914: 3 indicates that these are all by Francesco Bartoli, though he does not explicitly attribute this example, and its current mounting has obscured whether or not it was once signed on the back. A drawing of the decoration on the same wall above the staircase, as well as a description of the excavations and of the mural itself, appears in one of Pier Leone Ghezzi's notebooks, currently housed in the Vatican libraries (*Ottob. lat.* 3108 f. 111), for which see Guerrini 1971: 20–21, pl. 33.1.

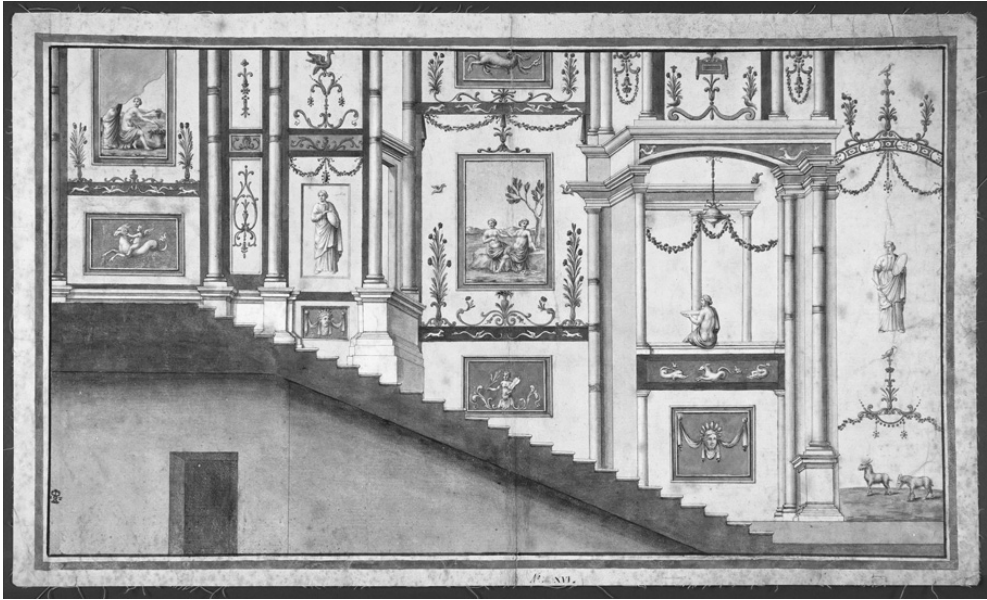


Figure I.1 Painted Staircase from the Domus Augustana, Palatine Hill, Rome, late first century CE. Watercolor, likely by Francesco Bartoli.

The subject matter of these panel paintings is difficult to discern.² Yet perhaps most noteworthy is not what they show, but their very presence within a mural composition in an architectural complex known primarily for the grandeur of its design and the lavishness of its decoration.³ It is worth pausing over the fact that, in one of the most prominent structures in the history of Roman architecture, adorned with plentiful marble cladding on its interior walls, a section of the decorative program was set aside for the comparatively cheap medium of fresco.⁴ The aesthetic impulses associated with the rich material of marble and those attached to the more humble medium of painting are often set at odds, but in the palace of

² One panel in the upper left seems to show a seated figure leaning over a basket on the ground and looking back over a shoulder, while the central panel depicts two seated figures leaning away from each other and gestulating. Note that in Ghezzi's sketch in the Vatican notebook (*Ottob. lat.* 3108 f. 11), the subject matter of the central panel more closely resembles two seated, reveling satyrs, or perhaps Dionysus and a satyr, and that what the Eton watercolor renders as a mask on the ground in front of the two figures may be a wreath. The left-hand panel does not appear in the Vatican drawing.

³ Stat. *Silv.* 4.2; Mart. 7.56.1–2; Suet. *Dom.* 14.1, 16.2; Plut. *Publ.* 15.5. See Darwall-Smith 1996: 179–215; Zanker 2002; Sasso D'Elia in *LTUR* II, 40–45, s.v. *Domus Augustana, Augustiana*; Sojc 2012; Wulf-Rheidt 2012. Cf. Ashby 1914: 60–61.

⁴ Though it should be noted that Nero's Domus Aurea had likewise combined decoration in marble and other stones with fresco. See e.g. Segala and Sciortina 1999: 29–39.

Domitian they seem to have coexisted.⁵ This fresco, in turn, plays overtly on the border between reality and fiction by evoking just such a grand architectural space as existed nearby in the palace and by articulating that space with fictive works of art. Opulence and its representation here stand less in opposition than in complement.

The watercolor's rendering of this mural scheme may not be accurate in every detail, but given that it was executed before the widespread excavation of Roman painting at Herculaneum and Pompeii, it nonetheless resonates with features of more securely attested examples. The combinations of surface elaboration and illusionistic depth, the play of believable and impossible architectural forms, and the tension between "real" figures, such as the woman seated with her back to the viewer holding a cornucopia inside the large *aedicula*, and "merely" represented figures, such as those depicted inside the fictive panels, are all hallmarks of murals of the late Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods. These elements are evident at Nero's Domus Aurea, the other great source of ancient painting in the city of Rome known in the early eighteenth century, but not in precisely such combinations.⁶ The decorative scheme depicted by the watercolor is plausible, in other words, even if its absolute veracity cannot be confirmed.⁷

Beyond attesting to the early fascination exerted by ancient paintings of paintings on modern observers, the purpose of evoking Bartoli's watercolor of the painted staircase from the palace of Domitian at the beginning of this book is to suggest that the appeal of the painting of painting exceeded many of the limits traditionally imposed by scholars on the study of Roman art. Even in the most richly decorated spaces of the empire, even after the time period in which most surviving Roman murals were produced, the painted wall could serve as the staging point for fictive works

⁵ Pliny (*HN* 35.2–3), for instance, laments that marble revetment and decoration in precious materials had displaced painting in preeminence in his day.

⁶ See for the Domus Aurea and its reception, e.g. Dacos 1969; Iacopi 1999; Segala and Sciortina 1999; Leach 2004: 156–166; Meyboom and Moorman 2013; Squire 2013e; cf. Joyce 1992.

⁷ If the Eton watercolor is by Francesco Bartoli, Ashby 1914: 3 notes that he often cannot be trusted for color and sometimes not for detail. Nevertheless, in the depiction of the overall scheme of the painting and especially of the format and placement of the fictive works of art, both the Eton example and Ghezzi's Vatican sketch are in close agreement, a sign, perhaps, of their accuracy. Note that Ghezzi's sketch does differ from the more polished Eton example in a number of ancillary details: it depicts the wall from a sharper visual angle, removes the Eros figure riding the hippocamp in the upper left, replaces the triton just above the staircase with another hippocamp and the head with rayed crown just to the right with a winged figure, and omits the landscape background in the central panel. On the accuracy of Ghezzi's archaeological representations see e.g. Guerrini 1971; Polignac 1993; Fusconi and Moteldo 1997.

of art, dominated both compositionally and thematically by panel painting. In such murals, one level of mimetic rhetoric, the illusion of a well-appointed architectural space, is disrupted by a second level of mimetic rhetoric, the fictive panel painting. Every fictive panel bears its own representational content. Some show moments from the mythological tradition, others still lifes, genre scenes, even landscapes. Yet all function as distinctly second-order fictions, independent planes of representation whose independence both depends upon and works against the frameworks that contain them.

The depiction of one art form within another is by nature a complex matter. It raises questions of medium specificity and transferability, of the goals and limits of representation, and of the very basis of artistic value. Paintings of paintings are almost inevitably what W.J.T. Mitchell has termed meta-pictures: paintings whose subject is the practice and status of painting itself.⁸ The depiction of panel painting in mural painting in first-century BCE and CE Rome was more complex still. Neither format was value-neutral. Rather, both carried deeply ingrained associations, and their interaction marked an important point of cultural negotiation. By incorporating the panel into the mural, artists and patrons folded a format of painting traditionally coded as Greek into one viewed as Roman. This act of embedding gave the domestic mural a role to play in the widespread re-evaluation of Greek culture in Roman life ongoing in the late Republic and early Empire.

This book examines how these fictive, mural panels played a key, and underappreciated, role in the repertoire of Roman painters from the first century BCE through the first century CE. The phenomenon spanned the uncertainty that marked the end of the Republic, the relative calm of the Augustan era, and the subsequent flux of Imperial succession and dynastic change. The appeal of the fictive panel, this book argues, was varied, but its longevity should serve as a reminder that it was not overdetermined by the specific circumstances of its creation. The book argues that the representation of panel painting within mural ensembles provides crucial visual evidence for the reception of Greek culture, and that it models complex thinking about the intertwined ethical and aesthetic values of art in the Roman world. The art world elucidated by these paintings comprises an interconnected web stretching between many aspects of ancient society, including private houses, public monuments, elite literature, and epigraphic habits. But the primary evidence is supplied

⁸ Mitchell 1994; cf. Gass 1970.

by the paintings themselves. The book thus makes the further claim, whose significance is as much methodological as historical, that the art objects discussed here are not simply subject to theoretical and historical thinking, but, rather, perform theory and history.

The book starts from a basic premise: that the depiction of one mode of painting within another is not just an act of imitation but also one of disruption. The fictive painted panel on the Roman wall provides an independent, discrete plane of representation which interrupts the primary spatial framework of the painted wall. The representational plane of the fictive panel works against that of the actual surface of the wall by offering an alternate conception of painting and of its role in the Roman house. This tension creates both literal and figurative space for reflection on the status of painting in Rome. It opens the wall to new pictorial genres, especially mythological and landscape painting. And it permits new perspectives on the history of painting, wherein significant formats of panel painting, well-attested historical styles, and famous subjects could be folded into contemporary compositions. This book argues that the fictive, mural panel provided a new, material way of negotiating the relationship between Greek and Roman culture. Through the representation of representation, painting effectively became a means to articulate the reception of a foreign but authoritative history within the production of contemporary Roman values.

The arguments marshaled here proceed thematically, moving from the modern historiography of Roman painting's relationship to its Greek precursors; to the acts of framing which both announce the fictive panel as a part of the painted wall and distinguish it from the other objects represented therein; the ethics and politics of art in Rome; the reciprocal play of medium, materiality, transparency, and opacity in the layering of painted fictions; and, finally, the historical relationships staged by the paradigmatic appropriation of Greek motifs, the arrangement of programmatic ensembles, and the creation of virtual collections.

Chapter 1 argues that the representation of panel painting within the Roman mural was an act of cultural negotiation which has had far-reaching repercussions for the evaluation of Roman painting. The chapter begins with the moment Roman painting entered the modern discipline of art history: a passage from Johann Joachim Winckelmann's foundational *History of the Art of Antiquity* discussing four first century CE paintings found in the *palestra* of Herculaneum. Through a close reading of Winckelmann's encounter with ancient painting, the chapter situates fictive panel painting as both a site where modern art history has felt closest to

the largely lost but much-lauded tradition of Greek panel painting, and where the Romans themselves navigated between their own painting traditions and those of the Greek past. It presents the case that in the late Republic and early Empire panel painting was coded as Greek and mural painting as Roman or Italic, and it introduces the complex and often ambivalent attitudes displayed by elite Romans toward Greece as a culture at once continuous with and disjunct from their own, which could alternately serve as a source of inspiration and a tropology of anxiety.

Chapter 2 considers how the representation of panel painting in wall painting is as much an act of disruption as of imitation. The chapter presents the pre-history of the meta-pictorial act in the ancient world prior to the middle of the first century BCE. It focuses in significant detail on the many different kinds of panel paintings represented in first-century murals, with special attention given to their frames. These frames, almost all of which are attested in the Hellenistic epigraphic record, serve the dual role of both announcing the distinctness of the fictive panel they surround and situating that panel within the larger illusionistic world of the mural. The paradox that duality entails, the chapter suggests, is a necessary precondition of meta-pictorial reflection.

Chapter 3 further explores how the painting of painting encoded artistic value. It focuses first on one of the earliest domestic spaces to display a significant number and variety of fictive panels: the so-called House of Augustus, located on the Palatine Hill in Rome. It argues that in the context of the late Republican and Augustan-era elite house, the painting of painting contributed to larger discourses surrounding the distinctions between public and private life and the evaluation of Greek culture in Rome. In the first centuries BCE and CE, the private acquisition and display of Greek art could be frequently condemned. Its public dedication, however, was seen to benefit the state and the citizen body. By re-casting the Greek panel within the confines of the Roman wall, patrons were able to enjoy the kinds of content panel painting permitted without the extravagant expense that was often censured. One of the motivations behind the painting of painting, accordingly, was to produce pleasures without luxury, to use a phrase employed by Statius in his description of the villa of Manilius Vopiscus.⁹ The chapter concludes that houses built for the uppermost echelon of Roman society deployed the fictive panel as both an ethical and political device, but one that was not necessarily attached to any specifically partisan message.

⁹ *Luxuque carentes deliciae*. Stat. *Silv.* 1.3.92–93. Cf. Newlands 2002: 119–153.

Chapter 4 advances the argument that the imposition of the panel in the mural offered muralists the chance for unprecedented experimentation in the depiction of materials and media of representation, in which they focused especially on the play between transparency and opacity. The complexity of the experiments in medium these paintings display is all the more remarkable because they have no clear equivalent in surviving written texts. The result was a layered and self-aware web of representational strategies, marked by a tension between the overall techniques of illusion and immersion that dominated Roman painting and the plane of representation offered by the panel itself. In other words, the fictive panel permitted Roman muralists to put their techniques and objects of representation into a productive dialogue, and thereby to problematize the very act of representation.

The fifth and final chapter suggests that the fictive panel allowed Roman patrons and painters to dramatize the place of Rome in the history of Mediterranean art. It thus offers a unique perspective on the Roman conception of art history well before our primary surviving example of a written history of art, Pliny's *Natural History*. The chapter has three areas of focus. First, it argues that the phenomenon of the fictive panel, considered broadly, offers new insight into the question of artistic imitation and replication. In place of the unidirectional concept of the Roman copy of the Greek painting tradition, it offers a dynamic model of paradigmatic participation. Second, the chapter explores the programmatic possibilities of ensembles of fictive panels, which could be combined to display mythological cycles or to communicate more abstract messages. Finally, it examines the construction of fictive art collections. In one such collection, at the Augustan Villa della Farnesina, a striking array of panel types and styles from the history of Greek painting were depicted. The cumulative effect of this array, the chapter argues, was both to position Imperial Rome as the natural culmination of the achievements of Greek culture and to proclaim a desire to participate anachronically in the phenomenon of Greek panel painting. Ethics and aesthetics sit in inextricable stasis, and in this dual impetus we may find a powerful insight into the Roman conception of art itself.

The book concludes with a short epilogue, which moves outward from the specifics of Roman painting toward a larger-scale reflection on the Roman meta-pictorial act in relation to its modern successors. This book seeks, ultimately, to understand how fiction, ethics, and aesthetics were both embedded within and expressed by painting in the Roman world. It argues that painting was a significant mode of ethical and aesthetic

expression, which was deeply tied up with the most pressing issues faced by Roman society in the first centuries BCE and CE. The painting of painting provided a means to reflect on that significance, and thus served, at one and the same time, as a kind of visual history and theory of art and as the matrix for entirely new modes of creativity.

1 | Winckelmann and the Cultural Dynamics of Painting

The historian of ancient Greco-Roman art possesses two robust but disparate bodies of evidence: one material, and one textual. On the one hand the ancient world has left behind a vast material record of its artistic production – a succession of statues, paintings, engraved gems, coins struck with images, carefully planned architectural forms, and complex urban environments. On the other hand it has bequeathed to posterity a rich written archive of its obsession with art. This discursive corpus ranges from the inventory lists of temple treasuries, to statue bases inscribed with dedications, to vivid descriptions of artworks both fictive and real, to histories of artistic development. These corpora present the scholar with a wealth of detailed information about the production and consumption of art objects in the ancient world. Together they form a picture of a complex culture of art. Remarkably, however, the two sets of evidence rarely intersect. That is, comparatively few physical works of art have survived that correspond to the discursive archive of ancient art, and relatively meager written records survive for the extant material evidence.¹

Nowhere is this rift more pronounced than in the case of ancient painting, especially panel painting, which according to ancient art writers constituted the most prestigious, most beautiful, and most developed of all Greco-Roman art forms. Yet it was also the most ephemeral. The result is that modern scholars have long struggled to define and articulate the relationship between the tradition of Roman wall painting – well preserved but little discussed in ancient sources – and that of Greek panel painting – extensively documented by ancient writers but almost entirely absent from the archaeological record.² The questions raised by this disparity go beyond the merely local concerns of the study of ancient painting to strike at the heart of key concepts in the practice of both art history and ancient

¹ A point made clear in examining the sources adduced in the most recent attempt at a comprehensive collection of literary and epigraphic evidence for the lives, careers, and works of Greek artists in *Der Neue Overbeck (DNO)*, where text and object comparatively rarely meet in a one-to-one correspondence. See *DNO*, with extensive commentary in Squire 2015d.

² See e.g. Eristov 1987: 109–123; Bianchi 2009: 137–147.

studies. What are the sources and values of art in a given society? To what degree is the study of art necessarily bound up with the study of artists? When discussing cultures like those of the Greeks and Romans, can we even speak of such a thing as art, or are the finely crafted objects modernity tends to call artworks better understood as just one kind among many agents of social, political, and religious forces?³

Our responses to more focused questions are at stake as well. The discipline of Roman art history has always had an uneasy relationship with the very concept of Roman art. What made art Roman, and the degree to which it depended upon earlier traditions, have long been matters of debate.⁴ Painting, and in particular the tension between the relative valuation of mural and panel painting, offers a productive field for such debates to play out, and, moreover, it also helps to demonstrate the degree to which many modern preoccupations ultimately derive from ancient ones. As a means of addressing these questions, this chapter goes back to the mid-eighteenth century, at the moment when Roman wall painting entered the modern discourse of the history of art. It centers on Johann Joachim Winckelmann's encounter with the material remains of the ancient painting tradition, and the difficulties he faced in incorporating that encounter into the grand arc of his history of ancient art. The paintings discussed here, although undeniably pieces of mural compositions, were treated by Winckelmann as though they were in fact independent panels, and although found during the excavations of long-since Roman Campania, they were included in his history of Greek painting. The chapter seeks to cast light onto the context of Winckelmann's seemingly paradoxical handling of these paintings by showing how it, in turn, derived from a set of attitudes that were already present in ancient sources and were further amplified by the unequal preservation of the art world in the literary and archaeological records.

The modern willingness to excise panel-like compositions from mural ensembles, whether notionally or actually, the chapter suggests, was not merely capricious, but an attempt to recover an ancient history of art that otherwise seemed lost. This act of recovery, further, appeared to have been legitimated by the fictions of the paintings themselves. In the centuries since Winckelmann, the history of art has tended to either literalize or

³ For debates over this issue see e.g. Kristeller 1990; Shiner 2001; Porter 2009; Osborne and Tanner 2007; Platt and Squire 2010; Squire 2012a; 2015b; Jones 2016: 1–23.

⁴ Brendel 1953 recapitulates the terms of that debate through the mid-twentieth century; Kampen 2003 extends the discussion through the beginning of the twenty-first century. Hallett 2015 offers a recent conspectus and suggests directions for future research.

obscure those fictions, but as the subsequent chapters of the book will argue, such murals were already an attempt to find a place for the history of painting in the Roman world.

Winckelmann in Campania

Ancient sculpture had been continuously visible in Rome through the Middle Ages and Renaissance; it was unearthed and studied with increasing frequency from the sixteenth century onward.⁵ Prior to the eighteenth century, however, very little ancient painting had been known to modern interpreters.⁶ What painting was known, such as that of the Domus Aurea, rediscovered at the end of the fifteenth century, was largely viewed either as a source of inspiration for contemporary art or as an object of antiquarian interest.⁷ The beginning of large-scale excavations of the ancient sites on the Bay of Naples covered by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE, however, coincided with the formation of the modern discipline of art history. The theater at Herculaneum was discovered in 1710; under the aegis of the Bourbon monarchs of Naples official excavations began there in 1738 and followed at Pompeii ten years later.⁸ These sites yielded Roman paintings in previously unprecedented quantities.⁹

Johann Joachim Winckelmann, already among the premier scholars of ancient art in Europe, visited Naples in 1758 and again in 1762 in order to examine the ancient sites and newly discovered artworks.¹⁰ In the *Letter on the Herculaneum Discoveries*, published in Dresden in 1762, Winckelmann remarks on the high quality of four paintings, found by excavators, he claims, leaning against a wall at Stabia.¹¹ These four paintings, he writes, had been executed with more skill than any others yet recovered by the Bourbon excavations, and called to mind the “works of the great and celebrated Greek artists of the best periods.”¹² In the groundbreaking *History of the Art of Antiquity*, published two years later and widely

⁵ See e.g. Haskell and Penny 1981; Barkan 1999; Marvin 2008: esp. 16–119.

⁶ For the relatively few ancient Roman paintings known from the fifteenth to early eighteenth centuries, of which the most famous were those decorating Nero’s Domus Aurea, see especially Dacos 1969; Joyce 1992; cf. Yuen 1970; Iacopi 1999; Segala and Sciortina 1999; Squire 2013e.

⁷ See e.g. Momigliano 1950; Da Costa Kaufmann 2001.

⁸ On the early excavations see e.g. Parslow 1995; Pace 2000: 21–108; Mattusch 2011; 2013: 1–10.

⁹ See e.g. Najbjerg 2007; Valladares 2007. ¹⁰ Parslow 1995: 215–232; Mattusch 2011: 2.

¹¹ Winckelmann 1762: 31; 2011: 83; Mattusch 2011: 44; Moormann 1995: 23–26.

¹² Winckelmann 2011: 83; cf. 1762: 30.

regarded as the foundational text for the modern discipline of art history,¹³ Winckelmann discusses the same paintings at greater length:

There were four paintings, which I shall describe in detail, that along with their wall backing had been cut out and moved from elsewhere. They were leaning against the wall and were laid against each other back-to-back, in pairs, such that the painted sides remained outward. Presumably they were obtained from Greece or Magna Graecia and were about to be set in place and inserted into the wall. These four paintings have painted borders with bands of different colors. The outermost is white, the middle one violet, and the third green, and this band is outlined with brown lines; all three bands together are the width of the tip of a little finger; on the inside of these runs a white band a finger in width.¹⁴

Winckelmann indeed goes on to describe each painting in detail – delineating the compositions, listing the number of figures, recording the colors, and even identifying such items as furniture, clothing, weapons, and musical instruments.¹⁵ In so doing he refers not only to other works of ancient art but also to a broad selection of ancient authors, ranging from Homer to Lucian. He does not specify the subject matter of the first painting, now commonly known as the investment of a priestess (Figure 1.1), which shows four women, one of whom is veiled and seated, in an interior space decorated with wooden furniture, a glass vessel, and other objects.¹⁶ But he identifies the second as a tragic poet; it shows a man in a long white garment seated on a stool, holding a scepter in his right hand, and looking to his left at a dramatic mask, attended to by a standing man and a kneeling woman writing on a board just underneath the mask (Figure 1.2).¹⁷ He hypothesizes that the third, with two youths and a horse depicted at an extremely foreshortened angle, may depict Achilles and Patroclus;¹⁸ and the fourth, the most fragmentary, he describes as a concert.¹⁹

We know, thanks to notes left by the leader of the Bourbon excavations, Karl Weber, that these four paintings were actually found in the *palestra* of Herculaneum on February 21, 1761, rather than at Stabia.²⁰ It is also

¹³ See e.g. Potts 1994; Davis 1996; Testa 1999; Decultot 2000; Pommier 2003; Potts 2006; Harloe 2013.

¹⁴ Translation adapted from Winckelmann 2006: 254; cf. 1764a: Pt.1.Chpt. 4.Sect.5.2.C, 269–270.

¹⁵ Winckelmann 2006: 254–257; cf. 1764a: Pt.1.Chpt. 4.Sect.5.2.C, 269–275.

¹⁶ Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: 162, no. 45.

¹⁷ Now frequently known as the “Actor King.” Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: 164, no. 47, with bibliography.

¹⁸ Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: 165, no. 48, with bibliography.

¹⁹ See: Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: 163, no. 46, with bibliography.

²⁰ D’Alconzo 2002: 23, no. 48; printed in Ruggiero 1885: 339–341; cf. a longer description of the discovery and the panels in Paderni 2000: 9–12, XXII; D’Alconzo 2002: Appendix, no. 11.



Figure 1.1 Investment of a Priestess, from the Palestra, Insula Orientalis, Herculaneum, mid-first century CE.

unlikely, for a variety of reasons, that they were imported to Herculaneum from the Greek world. Rather, as Winckelmann would come to correct himself in his second report on the discoveries from the areas around Vesuvius, they were probably produced in Herculaneum or close by in the mid-first century CE.²¹ They were certainly originally part of a set of mural paintings, excised and set aside to be re-inserted into a new mural. The completion of this last labor must have been interrupted by the eruption of Vesuvius. Winckelmann's lengthy descriptions of the paintings are otherwise precise. He concludes the passage by claiming that a straightforward motivation lay behind his approach: he has included all the information that he wishes ancient authors such as Pausanias – one of the most important sources for his attempts to write a comprehensive history of the art of antiquity – had recorded in their descriptions of artworks.²²

²¹ Winckelmann 1764b: 4; 2011: 165; cf. Parslow 1995: 221, 229.

²² Winckelmann 2006: 257; cf. 1764a: Pt.1.Chpt.4.Sect.5.2.C, 275.



Figure 1.2 Actor King, from the Palestra, Insula Orientalis, Herculaneum, mid-first century CE.

This seems, on the surface, to be a fairly mundane passage of the *History of the Art of Antiquity*. The four paintings, curious primarily due to the circumstances under which they were found, allow Winckelmann to demonstrate his descriptive acumen and his vast erudition. Once he has exhausted their compositional, stylistic, and iconographical peculiarities, he moves on. But on further inspection, the passage is not nearly so straightforward. Rather, it re-capitulates many of the ambiguities and paradoxes that this kind of Roman wall painting presents, both to Winckelmann and to scholars today.

The first point of note is Winckelmann's direct comparison of the *History of the Art of Antiquity* with Pausanias' *Description of Greece*, an

already retrospective and in many senses deliberately archival text, written in the second century CE, which enumerates and describes the most important sites and artworks of Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greece.²³ It is not enough that Winckelmann simply call upon his knowledge of ancient writers on art.²⁴ He compares himself directly to such writers. What Pausanias has not recorded, what we wish Pausanias had recorded, Winckelmann will supply.²⁵ This was not just an idle claim. Winckelmann's treatment of the Herculaneum panels does diverge in important ways from his ancient predecessor's approach to artworks. Pausanias was undoubtedly interested in the historicity of material culture. He invests time and effort in laying out information about artists and patrons, about the motivations behind and the rituals surrounding artworks, but he is comparatively silent on the actual materiality of such works. In his description of paintings depicting the sack of Troy and Odysseus' journey to the underworld by the fifth-century BCE artist Polygnotos in the *lesche* of the Knidians at Delphi, for example, Pausanias expounds on subject matter at great length, and gives some guides to matters of composition – placing scenes in relation to one another by giving proximate directions such as above and below, left and right.²⁶ Yet he largely ignores not only the minutiae of iconography, such as descriptions of objects within the scenes, but also the more subtle questions of material, siting, and even the measurements that Winckelmann includes.

In this attention to detail the new modern art history really does present a departure from its ancient models. Yet there are also ideological implications behind Winckelmann's self-reflexive gesture toward Pausanias. It may be an act of self-aggrandizement, in which Winckelmann claims the authority of antiquity for himself. But perhaps more importantly it also deftly raises the status of the four paintings under discussion, which in one view were merely the detritus of a campaign of redecoration found littered on the floor of a gymnasium. Winckelmann's focus on the materiality of those paintings, I would further suggest, plays an important role in this act of elevation.

²³ See e.g. Alcock 1996; Arafat 1996; Elsner, Alcock, and Cherry 2001; Pretzler 2007.

²⁴ On the range of which see e.g. Donahue 1995.

²⁵ On Winckelmann's relationship to Pausanias see especially Harloe 2010; Pretzler 2010.

²⁶ Paus. 10.25.2–10.31.12; *DNO* nos. 1476–1482. For an attempt at a reconstruction of the paintings on the basis of this description see Stansbury-O'Donnell 1989; 1990; cf. Castriota 1992: 88–127.

Modes of Ancient Painting

The Herculaneum paintings are pieces cut out from larger fresco ensembles, a fact that Winckelmann openly acknowledges. But he otherwise treats them not as fragments of a once-intact mural but as independent, essentially portable paintings. And, as the quotation given above indicates, he pays surprisingly careful attention to the borders of the paintings. I suggest that he does so not only to delimit the four paintings as a cohesive group, but to draw his reader's attention to the framing function these borders play. Although he does not explicitly call any of these borders a frame, *Rahmen*, preferring the more descriptively neutral *Leisten*, or strip, his description moves from the outside in, listing a thin line of white, then one of violet, and then one of green. He does not discuss the outermost border of the surviving fragment, a thick swathe of brown, implying, perhaps, that he took it to be a part of the larger context of the mural, the ground against which the panel serves as a figure.

Plates of the Herculaneum paintings were not published in the 1764 edition of the *History of the Art of Antiquity*, and it is possible that the reader may not have immediately intuited the frame-like quality of their borders from Winckelmann's text alone.²⁷ But engravings of all four paintings were published in the fourth volume of the official publication of the Bourbon excavations, the *Antichità di Ercolano esposte*, issued just a year later in 1765.²⁸ Here again the frames of the paintings are given a remarkable amount of attention in the accompanying text, and again they are discussed before the figural scenes. The plates of the *Antichità*, likewise, reproduce the borders in painstaking detail. They even include, in the case of the actor king, detailed representations of how the border had been broken (Figure 1.3). Moreover, even without the benefit of color, the shading techniques employed by the engravers of the *Antichità* plates distinguish the borders as discrete units distinct from both background and primary scene.

²⁷ Instead engravings of two other paintings, already lost by the time of the publication of the *History*, accompanied this section. These engravings focus solely on the figural scenes, giving no indication of the broader context in which the scenes were placed. These paintings, according to Winckelmann, had been found near Rome at an unknown location. Winckelmann 1764a: Pt.1.Chpt.4.Sect.5, 262–263, Pt.1.Chpt.4.Sect.5.2.E, 277–279; 2006: 83, 258–259.

The subsequent section, which deals with Roman art, was accompanied by an engraving of a scene taken from the incised decoration of the bronze Ficoroni Cista, signed by an artist named Novios Plautios. Winckelmann 2006: 83, 284–285; cf. 1764a: Pt.1.Chpt.5.Sect.1, 289.

²⁸ *AdE* 4: 191–211, Pl. 53–54. Cf. Sampaolo 2016. For an earlier, abandoned project to publish the finds from the Vesuvian area see Burlot 2011.



Figure 1.3 Engraving of the Actor King, after *Antichità di Ercolano esposte*, vol. 4, 195: pl. 51.

If we accept that Winckelmann, or the scholars who produced the *Antichità*, meant us to understand the borders of the paintings as picture frames, however, we must then ask why they should want to do so. The concept of the frame is discussed in greater depth in [Chapter 2](#). For

now it will suffice to point out that frames, which had always been a key aspect of European painting, began to play an overt role in discourses of aesthetics in the eighteenth century.²⁹ By giving the Herculaneum paintings frames, accordingly, Winckelmann may aestheticize them, converting them from mere antiquities into works of high art. In so doing he indicates that what lies within these frames will be the real object of his discussion, that it will be the art of which he is writing a history.

Yet, to frame these Roman paintings was not merely to aestheticize them. It was also to imbue them with added historical value. That is, by emphasizing the borders/frames of the four excised mural paintings, Winckelmann acts as though they were independent panel paintings. This is a significant point. According to ancient authors, panels had provided the medium for the most highly valued developments in painting from the fifth century BCE onwards. For Pliny the Elder, after the advances in illusionistic representation made by Apollodoros of Athens in the late fifth century BCE (*HN* 35.60), the greatest Greek painters had worked almost exclusively in that medium, and indeed most discussions of the history of painting revolve around Greek panel painters.³⁰

For Roman writers of the first centuries BCE and CE, who lived in spaces decorated with the kinds of the paintings discussed in this book, and who supply a significant portion of extant art-historical writing, panel painting seems to have been understood as a Greek phenomenon, and wall painting as a Roman or Italic one. This point is never made absolutely explicit in ancient art writing, but it is nevertheless a pervasive trope. Pliny provides illustrative detail (*HN* 35.17–18):

For at that time painting had been perfected also in Italy. In any event, there are still extant today pictures in the sacred structures of Ardea which are older than the city of Rome, by which I am truly astounded, as, although they have endured for such a long time without a roof, they seem as though freshly applied. A similar situation obtains at Lanuvium, where the nude figures of Atalanta and Helen have been painted close together by the same artist, each of exceeding beauty, though the first as a virgin. These were not ruined even when the temple had been shaken down. Aroused by desire, the emperor Caligula tried to remove them, but the nature of the plaster would not permit it. There survive at Caere some paintings even older

²⁹ Kant 2000; cf. e.g. Harries 1989; Wood 1993.

³⁰ For Apollodoros see *DNO* nos. 1578–1588. This privileging of panel painting is made relatively explicitly in Roman discussions of Greek art history, see e.g. Plin. *HN* 35; cf. Cic. *Brut.* 70; Quint. *Inst. Orat.* 12.10.3–6. It is made implicitly whenever a panel painter is chosen by an ancient author to illustrate artistic excellence – see very selectively Plaut. *Poen.* 1271; Dion. Hal. *Din.* 7; Stat. *Silv.* 2.2.63–67; 4.6.8–31; Ael. *Var Hist.* 14.47.

than those, and whoever should judge them carefully will admit that no art was perfected more quickly than painting, since it does not seem to have existed at the time of the Trojan War.³¹

When Pliny describes the mural paintings at Ardea, Lanuvium, and Caere, he emphasizes both their great age and their Italian-ness.³² Executed, he says, before the founding of Rome itself, these paintings had been in existence for at least eight centuries prior to the composition of the *Natural History*. Although Pliny remarks upon the beauty of the painted figures at Lanuvium, and although those figures depict subjects from the Greek mythological tradition, he focuses especially on their medium of execution and mural context. He is astounded that the paintings at Ardea have remained vibrantly colored even in the absence of a roof. Those at Lanuvium are not only still bright but remarkably durable: the nature of the plaster (*tectorii natura*) has survived both an earthquake and Caligula's attempts to remove it. The antiquity of these paintings, their fixed location in public buildings and non-transferability to private collections, and the proof they offer of the long tradition of mural painting in Italy all make them worthy of Pliny's esteem.

This is in contrast to Pliny's view of panel painting, which was praiseworthy for essentially opposing reasons: its beauty, the inherent flexibility and portability of the medium, and its Greek origins (*HN* 35.37):

But no glory is to be given to any artist except those who paint panels. For this reason the wisdom of antiquity is shown to be the more worthy of respect. For they did not decorate walls for masters alone nor houses destined to remain in a single place, things which cannot be rescued from a fire. Protegenes was content with a house in his little garden; there was not a single picture in the house of Apelles. Not yet was it fashionable to color in every part of the walls; the art of all

³¹ *Iam enim absoluta erat pictura etiam in Italia. exstant certe hodieque antiquiores urbe picturae Ardae in aedibus sacris, quibus equidem nullas aequae miror, tam longo aevo durantes in orbitate tecti veluti recentes. similiter Lanuvi, ubi Atalante et Helena comminus pictae sunt nudae ab eodem artifice, utraque excellentissima forma, sed altera ut virgo, ne ruinis quidem templi concussae. Gaius princeps tollere eas conatus est libidine accensus, si tectorii natura permisisset. durant et Caere antiquiores et ipsae, fatebiturque quisquis eas diligenter aestimaverit nullam artium celerius consummatam, cum Iliacis temporibus non fuisse eam appareat.* Text from and translation adapted from the Loeb edition of Rackham 2003: 272–273.

³² See additionally: Carey 2003: 102–137; Leach 2004: 7–9; cf. Rouveret 2015: 109–110. Note that not only the practice of mural painting but that of so-called triumphal painting, the historical paintings detailing successful military campaigns carried in triumphal processions, may also have been considered a local genre. See e.g. Blanckenhagen and Alexander 1990: 41–49; Holliday 2002: 22–62; 1997; Tortorella 2008; 2010; cf. La Rocca 2008b.

of these lay out of doors in the cities, and the painter was the common property of the world.³³

By choosing as his primary examples Protogenes and Apelles, the two most famous Greek painters of the late fourth century BCE, Pliny indicates that antiquity is meant to designate the Greek rather than Roman past.³⁴ The distinction he draws, accordingly, is not merely between portable panel and immobile mural painting, but between Greek and Roman.³⁵ Pliny casts the painted panel as an essentially Greek object, which compares favorably to contemporary and thus Roman painting practices. Here Pliny does not appear to have public murals such as those from Ardea or Lanuvium in mind but rather private, domestic decoration. Yet the point of contrast is the same: Greek painting finds its expression on panel, and Italian or Roman painting in mural.

One way to mark this distinction is to note that, while almost all of the Classical and Hellenistic Greek painters Pliny discusses are identified as panel painters, the Roman painters he names are largely muralists. The painters with Roman names discussed by Pliny in Book 35 of the *Natural History* include the Republicans Fabius Pictor and Pacuvius (35.19);³⁶ the *eques* Turpilius and the *praetor* Tuditius Labeo (35.20); Quintus Pedius, a young aristocrat in the Augustan Age (35.21); Arellius (35.23); Marcus Plautius Lycon, a painter from Greek Asia Minor granted citizenship for his paintings at Ardea (35.115); Studius, or Ludius, the Augustan landscape painter (35.116–117); Famulus, decorator of Nero's Domus Aurea (35.120), and Cornelius Pinus and Attius Priscus, who decorated the temples of Honos and Virtus for Vespasian (35.120). Of these eleven figures, seven are said to be mural painters, and only one is explicitly designated as a painter of panel pictures.³⁷

³³ *Sed nulla gloria artificum est nisi qui tabulas pinxere. eo venerabilior antiquitatis prudentia apparet. non enim parietes excolebant dominis tantum nec domos uno in loco mansuras, quae ex incendiis rapi non possent. casa Protogenes contentus erat in hortulo suo; nulla in Apellis tectoriis pictura erat. nondum libebat parietes totos tinguere; omnium eorum ars urbibus excubabat, pictorque res communis terrarum erat.* Text from and translation adapted from the Loeb edition of Rackham 2003: 348–349.

³⁴ For Protogenes see DNO nos. 2993–3032, esp. 2994; for Apelles DNO nos. 2846–2990, esp. 2937.

³⁵ See e.g. Gschwanter 2000; Bianchi 2007 with extensive bibliography.

³⁶ For Fabius Pictor as a muralist cf. Val. Max. 8.14.6; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 16.3.6.

³⁷ For discussion cf. Toynbee 1950: 35–38; Eristov 1987: 113–115; Meyboom 1995a. The attention given by Pliny to Roman painters is itself striking; only a single sculptor with an apparently Roman name, Coponius, is mentioned in the entirety of the *Natural History* (36.41). He is said to have sculpted 14 statues of *nationes* for a complex near the Theater of Pompey. Erich Gruen

We may further note that the six of the eight Greek painters recorded in Rome by literary sources were explicitly known as panel painters. They are: Demetrios the *chorographos*, or topographical painter;³⁸ Dionysios and Sopolis, active during the time of Cicero;³⁹ Antiochus Galbinus, a freedman working in Sopolis' workshop and deported from Rome, according to Cicero, by the *Lex Papia*;⁴⁰ Iaia of Cyzicus, a female painter skilled in encaustic;⁴¹ and Artemidoros.⁴² Two Greek artists, Damophilos and Gorgasos, who decorated the temple of Ceres by the Circus Maximus, worked in both plaster modeling and in mural.⁴³ But the temple of Ceres was built in the early fifth century, apparently before the ascendancy of panel painting (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.94), and these works were later excised from the walls of the temple and displayed as independent objects.

The epigraphic record offers little aid in untangling the relationship between the cultural identity of painters and their preferred media, especially as it is not at all clear that a painter with a Greek name working on behalf of a Roman patron would have been considered a Greek artist in the vein of Apelles or Protogenes.⁴⁴ The archaeological record, which preserves painting on ephemeral materials so poorly, is of less help, although it indicates that the artists of the Roman, Italic, Etruscan, and Greek worlds were operating within a broadly common visual tradition during the Hellenistic period.⁴⁵ The division between panel and mural may have been more discursive than actual; two third-century BCE papyri from Ptolemaic Egypt preserve notice of a painter named Theophilos who

has suggested that Coponius might really have been of Greek origin, however, as Pliny indicates Marcus Plautius was. See Gruen 1992: 134.

³⁸ Diod. Sic. 31.18.2; Val. Max. 5.1.1; *DNO* nos. 3566–3567.

³⁹ Plin. *HN* 35.148; cf. 35.113; *DNO* nos. 4057–4059; 4062. ⁴⁰ *Ad Att.* 4.18.4; *DNO* no. 4063.

⁴¹ Plin. *HN* 35.147–148; *DNO* nos. 4054–4055. ⁴² Mart. 5.40; *DNO* no. 4270.

⁴³ Plin. *HN* 35.154–155; *DNO* nos. 711–712.

⁴⁴ See Giuliano 1953. Cf. *EAA* VI.156–159, s.v. *pictor*. A common supposition amongst modern art historians has been that most artists working for Roman patrons were of Greek origin. See for discussion Stewart 2008: 10–38. For analysis of the tenuousness of attempts to link names with cultural identities see especially Squire 2015d. When writing appears within or on Roman murals, it is often in Greek. See Thomas 1995; Newby 2016: 13. This applies to labels, such as on the Odyssey landscapes from Rome or at the House of the Cryptoporticus in Pompeii (I.6.2), to longer passages, such as the verses from the House of the Epigrams in Pompeii (V.1.18), and to signatures, such as that of Seleukos, scratched into a column from *cubiculum* D of the Villa della Farnesina in Rome. Latin texts do appear on Roman wall paintings, although to my knowledge only one secure Latin signature is known in the corpus of Roman wall painting, *Lucius pinxit*, found in the so-called *biclinium* of the House of Octavius Quartio in Pompeii (II.2.2). More generally on signatures in ancient art see e.g. Donderer 1997: 2004; Osborne 2010; Hurwit 2015.

⁴⁵ E.g. Pollitt 1986: 150–164, 185–209; Steingraber 2006: 245–305; Coarelli 2011: 148–170; La Torre and Torelli 2011; Rouveret 2014.

seems to have produced both mural and panel paintings.⁴⁶ We certainly should not imagine that Romans artists never painted on panels. They must have created innumerable panel paintings, whose purposes ranged from votive offerings dedicated in sanctuaries to treasured heirlooms kept in private homes. But the record of these panels is largely absent from ancient literature. It is these often ideologically driven literary sources that reflected and defined elite attitudes to material culture, and which survived to shape the arc of modern art history devised by Winckelmann. Those sources appear to assign the two modes of painting – panel and mural – to different cultural spheres. When Winckelmann treats the Herculaneum paintings as panels, accordingly, he effectively brings them into closer contact with the highest achievements of Greek painting, as he had evoked in the *Letter on the Herculaneum Discoveries*.

Writing Art's History

Underlying and supporting this interpretation is the fact that the Herculaneum panels are presented in the middle of Winckelmann's account of ancient *Greek* painting.⁴⁷ Winckelmann suggests that all of the paintings under discussion in this chapter were executed by Greek artists, but he only explicitly attributes the four excised murals and four additional paintings on marble supports from Herculaneum, including a depiction of Niobe, Leto, and several of the Niobids playing knucklebones, on which the figures are labeled in Greek and the signature of Alexandros the Athenian, also in Greek, appears in the upper left (Figure 1.4).⁴⁸ Although the painted marbles are now largely monochromatic, it appears that they originally featured more polychromy, and that

⁴⁶ P.Cair.Zen.3.59445 discusses the decoration of a house; PSI 4.407 mentions panels. See Nowicka 1984; Scheibler 2003; *DNO* nos. 3054–3054a–c.

⁴⁷ It is worth noting that Winckelmann compares writing the history of Greek painting to collecting the “individual planks” (*einzelner Bretter*), of wood from a shipwreck. This offers an uncanny, if possibly inadvertent, echo of his interest in panel painting, often though not exclusively carried out on wooden supports. Winckelmann 1764a: Pt.1.Chpt.4.Sect.5, 263; 2006: 251.

⁴⁸ Winckelmann 2006: 260–261; cf. 1764a: Pt.1.Chpt.4.Sect.5.4, 281–282. For the panel signed by Alexandros with the knucklebones players see e.g. Robert 1897; Donati 1998: 315, no. 148; Baldassare *et al.* 2006: 143–144; Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: 167, no. 50; cf. Clarke 1991: 254; *DNO* nos. 4049–4050. The full significance of Winckelmann's attribution of the paintings he discusses to Greek artists only becomes clear in the later chapter on Roman art, during which he both proclaims that it is a mistake to identify a specifically Roman artistic style, and mentions no paintings at all other than those of the Domus Aurea. Winckelmann 2006: 283–297; 1764a: Pt.1.Chpt.5, 289–302.



Figure 1.4 *Knucklebones Players*, painting on marble signed by Alexandros the Athenian, first century BCE to first century CE.

they are likely neo-Attic products of the first centuries BCE or CE modeled on Classical Greek painting.⁴⁹ Winckelmann identifies them as drawings, *Zeichnungen*, does not explicitly date them, and although he labels the artist as “learned and confident,” he gives them a rather tepid appraisal, preferring the more elaborate compositions of the excised murals.⁵⁰ The discussion of those mural panels constitutes, moreover, by far the

⁴⁹ Further on the small group of painted marble panels from Campania, including a number found since Winckelmann, see e.g. Robert 1895; 1898; 1899; 1903; Mielsch 1979; Graeve 1984; Clarke 1991: 254; Donati 1998: 315, no. 147; Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: 117–119, 166–169; cf. Graeve and Preusser 1981.

⁵⁰ Winckelmann 1764a: Pt.1.Chpt.4.Sect.5.2.B, 268–269; 2006: 254. Note the prior publication of the painted marbles in 1757 with pride of place as the first plates of the first volume of the *Antichità di Ercolano esposte*, *AdE* 1.1–19, pls.1–4.

longest part of the section. He discusses paintings from some nineteen sites in this chapter, normally dedicating at most a paragraph to each. The four excised panels, by comparison, merit six pages of text. Thus, although Winckelmann would subsequently clarify that the excised panels were likely produced locally, and not imported from the Greek world, here, in his most ambitious and most influential work, they make up the very centerpiece of the history of Greek painting.⁵¹

Evaluating the significance of this fact requires understanding both the larger framework of the *History of the Art of Antiquity* and the ancient art-historical sources upon which it depended. In this monumental undertaking, Winckelmann provides a nuanced narrative of the development of ancient Mediterranean art, framed by a biological metaphor of growth and decay. He carefully distinguishes both period and regional styles among surviving ancient monuments and he offers explanatory hypotheses concerning the origins and purposes of those styles in ancient societies. The historical narrative of the book is intertwined with its aesthetic, ethical, and political agenda, however, and its periodization describes an arc centered on Classical Greece.⁵² In Winckelmann's view, the aesthetic significance of Classical Athenian art could not be disentangled from the fact that it had been created on behalf of a democracy. The beauty of political expression and the beauty of artistic expression were of a piece with one another.

Accordingly, Classical Greek art represented the apogee of all ancient Mediterranean artistic production. Each artistic period prior to the Classical was a step toward aesthetic perfection; each subsequent artistic period was a stage of decline. Roman art, according to Winckelmann's scheme, belonged to an age of imitators who attempted to maintain the memory of Classical perfection but supplied few genuine contributions to the history of art. Winckelmann does not suggest a date for the execution of the Herculaneum paintings. Nevertheless, when he equates them with the kind of works Pausanias might have described and hypothesizes that they may have been executed in the Greek world, he articulates both an exceptionally high degree of admiration for the works and his desire to place them closer to the center of his narrative of ancient artistic development.

Working from the text of the *History* as well as his notebooks, scholars have demonstrated the degree to which Winckelmann's art-historical narrative depended upon modern intellectual models.⁵³ But

⁵¹ For this correction see Winckelmann 1764b: 4; 2011: 165.

⁵² On the significance of which see e.g. Potts 1994: 182–221; Decultot 2000: 121–192; Pommier 2003: 253–280; cf. Marchand 1996.

⁵³ E.g. Potts 1982; Decultot 2000; Harloe 2013.

Winckelmann's deep familiarity with ancient art writing is incontrovertible.⁵⁴ And the arc of the *History* also mirrored, in its broad outlines – a story of the development of art, focusing on the Classical Greek world, that had already come into being in antiquity.⁵⁵ We return, here, to the disparity between the written and material archives of ancient art. Most extant ancient art-historical and art-theoretical writing was written in Latin or by Greek speakers living under the Roman Empire, such as Pausanias, but explicitly privileged the artists and styles of the Greek past. This is to say that, at least insofar as it survives, ancient art writing was profoundly historical in nature and especially oriented towards earlier phases of Greek art.⁵⁶ Pausanias' explicit brief was the material history of Greece, and the discussions of art history in Cicero (*Brut.* 70), Quintilian (*Inst. Orat.* 12.10.6), and, at greatest length, Pliny the Elder (*HN* 34–36), praise the artists of the Classical and early Hellenistic periods in particular.

Gregory Hutchinson has noted that Roman attempts to produce a history of literature, in part by identifying a canon of authors, tend to tell a narrative in which Greek literary accomplishments end during the third century BCE, around the time of the earliest canonical Latin authors.⁵⁷ He suggests that this prevented Greek and Latin literature from entering into direct competition with one another. A related but distinct situation obtains in Roman art writing. The histories of neither Cicero nor Quintilian mention artists later than the fourth century BCE. Pliny discusses of a number of Greek painters who flourished in the first century BCE, such as Timomachus of Byzantium and Iaia of Cyzicus, but he focuses overwhelmingly on Archaic, Classical, and early Hellenistic artists.⁵⁸ Unlike in Roman literary history, however, a robust and coherent body of Roman artists does not appear to continue or supplant Greek traditions. There are exceptions, of course: the Augustan muralist Studius is noted to have been the first painter of certain kinds of landscapes on walls (Plin. *HN* 35.116–117), and the Neronian painter Famulus is

⁵⁴ E.g. Donahue 1995; Kochs 2005; Harloe 2010; Pretzler 2010.

⁵⁵ The modern discussion of this tradition of ancient art historical writing itself has a long history. See e.g. Furtwängler 1877; Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1881; Kalkmann 1898; Schweitzer 1925; 1932; Austin R.G.P. 1944; Jucker 1950; Becatti 1951; Pollitt 1974; Rouveret 1989; Isager 1991; Settis 1993; Tanner 2006: esp. 141–276; de Angelis 2008; Squire 2012b; Koch 2013; Pollitt 2014; Squire 2015b.

⁵⁶ See for instance Michael Squire's observation that over 90 percent of the nearly 3000 entries on Greek sculptors and painters in *Der Neue Overbeck* taken from ancient literature (rather than inscriptions) date from the time of the Roman Empire. Squire 2015d: 526.

⁵⁷ Hutchinson 2014.

⁵⁸ For Timomachus see Plin. *HN* 35.40; 35.136; *DNO* nos. 3537–3563; for Iaia Plin. *HN* 35.147–148; *DNO* nos. 4054–4055.

supposed to have decorated the Domus Aurea in the dignity of a citizen's toga (Plin. *HN* 35.120). But these isolated figures do not so much continue a tradition as demonstrate its end. Despite Cicero's assertion that an inability to compete with the splendor of the past did not prevent new artists from creating sculptures and paintings (*Orat.* 2), the Roman artistic canon remained both predominantly Greek and distinctly historical.

The reasons behind this formulation of the artistic canon likely lay in a combination of aesthetic judgment, the biases of Roman writers' Hellenistic Greek sources, and the strictures of social organization.⁵⁹ According to Richard Gordon, for instance, the artists who were contemporaries with the elite producers of Latin art writing may have been left out of history because they were mostly slaves, freedmen, and members of the lower classes.⁶⁰ Historical Greek artists, by contrast, may have seemed to aristocrats such as Pliny like politically engaged citizens, and thus inherently more worthy of praise. Panel painting's pre-eminence may also have been related to the fact that it involved the least intensive physical labor; in a supposedly autobiographical passage Lucian relates that he avoided becoming a sculptor because of its back-breaking difficulty and because of the relatively low social esteem which the craft then garnered (Luc. *Somn.* 1–4).⁶¹

Translating Greece to Rome

Yet the literary sources' widespread praise of Greek art and relative silence on the art of Rome was only a part of a larger pattern. Although by the time of the late Republic Rome was the dominant military and political entity in the Mediterranean, encompassing both the Greek-speaking world and a host of other civilizations, Roman identity often seems to have been

⁵⁹ These Hellenistic sources may have been funneled to Pliny through Varro. See: Becatti 1951: 63–72; Pollitt 1974: 73–84; Manzo 1975.

⁶⁰ Gordon 1979. Note especially Plin. *HN* 35.77, asserting that no famous paintings or statues had been executed by slaves. Pliny does write, however, that painting in Rome could be practiced by the relatively high-born during the Republic (*HN* 35.19–23; cf. 35.112–119), but that this tradition had disappeared in more recent times (*HN* 35.2–3; 35.118–120). Also significant is a passage in Cicero (*Tusc.* 1.2.4), which claims that if a Roman aristocrat, such as Fabius Pictor, had been truly famous for his art, then many more high-born Romans would have been compelled to become artists. See de Angelis 2008: 88. For the status and agency of artists in the Roman world, see additionally Toynbee 1950; Calabi Limentani 1958; Burford 1972; Horsfall 1988; Stewart 2008: 10–38; Squire 2013d; cf. Harris 2015.

⁶¹ Romm 1990: 95–98; Ní Mhellaigh 2014: 206.

defined in relation to – even in opposition to – its Greek equivalent.⁶² This is a more complicated point than it may initially seem. The culture of Rome, understood as the habits of thought and action that were both shaped by and gave rise to political, social, religious, literary, and material expression, was intertwined with that of the Greek-speaking world from an early period. Elite, educated Romans, Erich Gruen has shown, were already deeply, irrevocably immersed in the techniques and products of Greek culture at the end of the third century BCE.⁶³

This mutual implication was even more pronounced in areas such as southern Italy and Campania, whose populations primarily spoke Greek or Italic languages rather than Latin, and who were not granted the right of citizenship until after the Social Wars in the early first century BCE. By the time of the late Republic and early Empire the two were so deeply enmeshed that it may even be misguided to attempt to distinguish “Greek” and “Roman” as distinct cultural entities (notwithstanding the historical, much less ideological, dangers inherent in ever talking about a single culture with respect to a national, linguistic, or ethnic identity). Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, for example, has shown that in both the literary and material realms Hellenization and Romanization were simply two sides of the same coin in the first century BCE.⁶⁴ The spread of Roman ideas and material culture depended directly on the joint adoption and adaptation of Greek practices. Late Republican and Imperial Roman art was, in important ways, another branch of the visual *koiné* of the broader Hellenistic Mediterranean, and the reception of Greek art, as Christopher Hallett has proposed, is surely at the very heart of Roman visual culture.⁶⁵ As Michael Squire, among others, has argued, an object as central to the canon of Roman art as the Augustus of Prima Porta evinces a marked push and pull between Greek visual tropes and Roman rhetorical effect in its style, stance, and costume.⁶⁶

We should be wary, accordingly, of the all-too-frequent scholarly tendency to propose a clear-cut separation of Greek from Roman. Yet the ancients themselves frequently made such a distinction.⁶⁷ This is to say, the

⁶² See e.g. Conte 1986; 2017; Henrichs 1995; Goldberg 2005; Marvin 2008: 10–15.

⁶³ Gruen 1992; 1996. ⁶⁴ Wallace-Hadrill 2008.

⁶⁵ Hallett 2015; cf. Beard and Henderson 2001; Newby 2016: 1–31.

⁶⁶ Squire 2013c, with bibliography. In discussing modern disciplinary paradigms, Squire 2011: 372–381 has also suggested that the separation of Greek from Roman within the western university is in part an artificial byproduct of the philological distinction between the surviving bodies of literature written in Greek and Latin.

⁶⁷ Roman writers do so explicitly. Greek writers, by contrast, draw such distinctions implicitly through their lack of interest in the languages and literatures of other cultures. See e.g. Feeney 2016: esp. 19–30.

reality of life was one of cultural interpenetration and creative adaptation, but literary discourse often sought to erect boundaries and identify differences. Viewed in this light, as a site of conflict and concord, the Roman reception of Greece becomes doubly important. Greece could serve as a source of both inspiration and anxiety, to be at once eagerly grasped and vigorously denied. This basic tension achieved particular prominence in the late Republic and early Empire, at a time marked by pronounced political and cultural change.⁶⁸

Late Republican and Imperial authors often tied the impact of Greece on Rome to Roman military and political expansion in the Mediterranean, with a striking emphasis on the role played by the visual arts.⁶⁹ As Roman generals conquered Greek-speaking cities in southern Italy and Sicily at the end of the third century BCE, they brought back people and material goods that would, in the eyes of these authors, profoundly influence the future of Roman culture. The spoliation of the cities of Magna Graecia was commemorated already in the second century BCE by the Greek historian Polybius in his history of Rome (9.10); it was further discussed by the Augustan historian Livy (24.34; 27.16; 34.4.4–5) and in the Imperial writer Plutarch's lives of Marcellus (Plut. *Marc.* 21) and Fabius (*Fab.* 22. 6–8), the generals responsible for the sacks of Syracuse and Tarentum, respectively.⁷⁰ Marcellus, according to these sources, despoiled the city of Syracuse of its most beautiful works of art, including important religious dedications, and brought them back to Rome; Fabius, however, left behind Tarentum's cult statues, although according to Livy he did take some statues and paintings (27.16.7–8).

The Roman discourse of the ethics of art consumption is discussed at greater length in [Chapter 3](#), but it is worth pointing out here that the contrasting actions of the two generals, who were also political rivals, seems to have occasioned an intense debate. This debate covered both the rectitude of their actions and whether the spoliated artworks provided a benefit to the citizenry of Rome, or whether the world of aesthetic refinement they bespoke was a mere distraction from traditional civic virtues. In the Republican encounter with Greek visual art, according to later authors, the conservative, rustic, and uncultured Roman way of life began to open itself to the urbane delights of Greece, to profound effect.

⁶⁸ See e.g. MacMullen 2000; Osgood 2006; Wallace-Hadrill 2008.

⁶⁹ See e.g. Jucker 1950: 46–86; Pape 1975; Pollitt 1978: 1986: 150–163; Ridgway 1984: 10–29; Galsterer 1994; Miles 2008: 13–104; Dardenay 2013; Rouveret 2015: 111–112; Newby 2016: 32–79.

⁷⁰ See e.g. Pape 1975: 166–167; Ferrary 1988: 573–578; Fabbrini 2001; McDonnell 2006.

There was undoubtedly a close connection between military conquest and the Roman reception of Greek art. Although trade in works of art and the movement of artists around the Mediterranean must have accounted for the greater part of the circulation of visual forms in the ancient world, the entry of spoliated artworks into the city of Rome via triumphal processions would have offered an especially dramatic demonstration of the history of art. But military metaphors were used to describe other kinds of cultural exchanges as well. So Horace claims that Greek artistic achievement overcame the military might of Rome, such that the conqueror became the conquered: “Greece, the captive, made her savage victor captive, and brought the arts into rustic Latium” (*Graecia capta ferum uictorem cepit et artis / intulit agresti Latio*, *Ep.* 2.1.156–157).⁷¹ Taken at face value, this view of influence leads to an historical model in which Roman cultural production is a mere imitation of that of Greece. But there was, of course, more at play. A well-known passage from Vergil’s *Aeneid* helps to contextualize Horace’s claim. At the end of the sixth book, which has seen the hero descend to the Underworld to consult with the shade of his father Anchises, we are presented with a vision of the role the Romans would claim in Mediterranean history (*Aen.* 6.847–853):

Others, I am sure, will more delicately shape bronze so that it seems to breathe, and bring living faces out of marble; they will plead cases better, draw the paths of heavenly bodies and tell the rising stars. But remember, Roman, you are to rule peoples with sovereign power. These will be your skills: to establish the custom of peace, to spare the conquered, and to tame the proud.⁷²

Vergil explicitly contrasts the cultural achievements (*artes*), of the Romans with those of the others (*alii*), whom we are to understand primarily as the Greeks. The distinction between the two civilizations appears to lie primarily in the difference between what we might now call the political and the cultural. The Greek arts will be sculpture in bronze and marble, oratory, astronomy; the Roman arts, by contrast, will be military and, most importantly, administrative competence.⁷³ Political

⁷¹ Text and translation from the Loeb edition of Fairclough 1926: 408–409. Cf. Henrichs 1995; cf. Young 2016: 12–16.

⁷² *excurrent alii spirantia mollius aera, / credo equidem, vivos ducent de marmore vultus, / orabunt causas melius, caelique meatus / describent radio et surgentia sidera dicent; / tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento / (hae tibi erunt artes), pacique imponere morem, / parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.* Text Perret 2012: 75.

⁷³ For the Romans’ tendency to cast themselves as humane victors and able administrators see Austin 1977: 264, citing Cic. *De off.* 1.35; Poly. 18.37.7; Liv. 30.42.17; 37.45.8; Hor. *Carm. saec.* 49; Aug. *RG* 26.2.

and military organization will conquer, both literally and figuratively, cultural development. Yet the passage also gestures in other directions.⁷⁴ Vergil does not say that the others will write better poetry, and the ambitions of his own epic were clearly to rival the greatest works of literature, Greek and otherwise. Rather than in any simple or unidirectional dichotomy, it is in this simultaneous play between deference and ambition, captor and captive, imitator and originator that we witness the complexities of Rome's relationship with Greece.

The military metaphor, which casts the translation of Greece to Rome as a process of conquest that both broadens the horizons of Roman life and threatens its integrity at the same time, was pervasive, but it was only one way of conceptualizing the issue, which moreover deliberately elided matters of practicality and change in habit in favor of broad ideological strokes. But there are other ways of marking such cross-cultural interactions, which are perhaps no less ideological but at least afford differing points of view. One is the actual act of translation from one language to another. Dennis Feeney has argued that the origins of Latin literature should be understood as a "translation project" which took over not only individual texts but even the very idea of literature as such from Greece.⁷⁵ Habituated as we are to the Classical tradition, Feeney suggests, we are not sufficiently surprised by the development of literature as an independent realm of discourse in the Greek world, or by the Roman adoption of that discourse. Roman literature, in this view, is the world's first vernacular literature.

As Feeney has also highlighted, the first generations of Latin authors, whose work consisted in no small part in translating Greek literature, were not native speakers of Latin. They were, rather, bilingual Greeks who had learned Latin, or multilingual Italic speakers who had learned both Latin and Greek, like Ennius, who claimed to have three hearts, expressed variously through Oscan, Greek, and Latin.⁷⁶ Hellenism, accordingly, was woven deeply and inextricably into the very fabric of elite Roman literary culture. By the late Republic, the canon of Greek literature and its storehouse of myths, rhetorical techniques, and philosophical knowledge was readily available to the elite, whose study of Greek began early and whose classrooms were at least in part bilingual.

⁷⁴ A point whose complexity is compounded by the intertext to Ennius (*Ann.* 370), in the line immediately prior to this passage. Austin 1977: 260 notes that the Ennius passage is also quoted by Livy (30.26.9), among others.

⁷⁵ Feeney 2016; cf. Fögen 2003; Goldberg 2005: esp. 1–51; Hutchinson 2014.

⁷⁶ Gell. *NA* 17.17.1; Feeney 2016: 65–91; cf. Fisher 2014.

Writers of the first century BCE were acutely aware of the problems and possibilities of translation, however. The earliest translators, not native speakers of Latin, had been translating out of Greek, but in the first century the trend was for Romans to translate into Latin. As Feeney points out, the results were surprising. Early Latin versions of Greek literature had domesticated a foreign tongue. Livius and Naevius both appealed to Latin archaisms but infrequently inserted Greek expressions into their works. Roman writers of the first century, conversely, filled their writings with Greek-like vocabulary and syntax.⁷⁷ In part this speaks to the success of the Hellenization of the Roman elite: Latin authors could highlight the Greek elements in their works because they could expect their audience to recognize them. And in part it speaks to an increasingly self-conscious play on the arbitrariness of the values of Greek and Roman, through which the strategies for navigating between the two expanded in number. In the early first century BCE, Catullus produced relatively precise translations of Greek poems by significant figures like Sappho (51) and Callimachus (66), and deftly interwove a variety of other appropriative, translation-like practices into his own poems.⁷⁸

Catullus' surviving corpus evinces a particularly creative and flexible relationship with the history of poetry and, by extension, the topic of translation, but he was not alone, as a rich and wide-ranging vocabulary attests: *vertere*, *convertere*, *transferre*, *traducere*, and *interpretari* all denote, with subtle variations in meaning and emphasis, the act of translating.⁷⁹ More generally here we might consider the entire tradition of literary intertextuality, which brings texts whose composition is separated by often great stretches of time into immediate proximity through resonances of subject matter, genre, meter, and vocabulary. Intertextual references could be predictable, as when Vergil echoes his epic predecessor Homer, but they could also be unexpected. Tom Keeline, for instance, has demonstrated the close correspondences between passages in the same poet's *Eclogues* and a Greek commentary on Theocritus' *Idylls*, likely one recently published by Theon of Alexandria.⁸⁰ It is in no small part through Theon's scholarly interpretation of Theocritus, Keeline argues, that Vergil himself comes to define the pastoral genre for a Roman audience.

The question of translation permeated more than just the ludic intertextuality of poetry. It also came into play in intellectual arenas where

⁷⁷ Feeney 2016: 53–64, 77–79. ⁷⁸ Young 2016.

⁷⁹ See e.g. McElduff 2013: 189–196; cf. Hutchinson 2014: 25–42; Bettini 2012; Feeney 2016: esp. 32–40; Young 2016: 6–12.

⁸⁰ Keeline 2017.

precision and clarity of expression were of particular importance, such as astronomy and philosophy, though here too it would be a mistake to leave issues of literary-ness aside.⁸¹ In the middle of the first century BCE both Lucretius and Cicero struggled to bring the concepts of Greek philosophy to a Roman audience.⁸² Bemoaning the extreme poverty, *egestas*, of his language, Lucretius indicates that Greek possessed a robust technical vocabulary that Latin lacked (1.832).⁸³ To address that difference the two authors could take a variety of tacks. A case in point is provided by the Greek term *atomos*, a fundamental concept in atomistic and especially Epicurean philosophy which denotes the smallest possible unit of matter, combinations of which make up, ultimately, everything in the physical universe.⁸⁴ Cicero tends to transliterate the term as *atomus*, apparently continuing a tradition already established in the second century BCE by Lucilius,⁸⁵ but Lucretius renders it, among other paraphrases, with the more cumbersome but ultimately more informative phrase *primordia rerum*, the first beginnings of things.⁸⁶

Vitruvius, writing toward the end of the first century BCE, faced similar problems of vocabulary in his treatise on architecture, for which he deployed a variety of solutions.⁸⁷ He frequently glosses a technical term in Latin by giving a Greek equivalent, but at times he simply gives the Greek, and at times only the Latin.⁸⁸ Hence in laying out the six key concepts of architectural practice at the beginning of the work (1.2.1), he uses the Latin *ordinatio*, order, to translate the Greek *taxis*. Similarly *dispositio*, arrangement, is the equivalent of *diathesis*, and *distributio*, distribution, translates *oeconomia*. But proportion and symmetry are labeled by their Greek terms alone, *eurythmia* and *symmetria*, respectively. And appropriateness is rendered only in Latin, as *decor*, without any further gloss, despite the fact that the idea seems to have been closely related to the Greek term *prepon*.⁸⁹ How and why Vitruvius translates, transliterates, or does neither must depend upon specificities of context, denotation, and connotation; the fact that much of his technical terminology is otherwise poorly attested can make it difficult to assess how edifying

⁸¹ E.g. Possanza 2004; Fögen 2005; 2009: 67–105; Roby 2016.

⁸² For Lucretius see e.g. Sedley 1999; 2009: 35–61; Warren 2010. For Cicero: Powell 1995; Glucker 2012.

⁸³ Farrell 2001: 28–51.

⁸⁴ See Democr. 9, 125; Epicur.Nat.14 Fr. 5; cf. Arist.de An.404a2; Metaph.1039a10.

⁸⁵ Cic. *Fin.* 1.17; *Nat. D.* 1.54; *Fat.* 22; cf. Lucil. 753. ⁸⁶ E.g. Lucr. 1.55.

⁸⁷ See e.g. Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 144–212; Nichols 2017.

⁸⁸ See for general discussion e.g. Roby 2016: 81–82; Nichols 2017: 23–41.

⁸⁹ Marvin 2008: 169–170; cf. e.g. Pollitt 1974: 68–70, 217–218, 341–347.

it would have been to include both Greek and Latin usage. The variety of approaches the *De Architectura* evinces, however, would seem to indicate that questions of both clarity and literary style would have played a role. Many further examples could be adduced, but the point is clear: the broad spectrum of translation-like acts attests to a mutual intersignification of Greek and Latin far exceeding simplistic metaphors of conquest.

The Roman Fictive Panel

This book proposes that an analogously wide-ranging and complex set of responses were available for the transformation of Greek art in Rome. Some of these responses were stylistic, some thematic, and most a complex agglomerate.⁹⁰ But the construction of meaning in the visual arts differs significantly from that in literature.⁹¹ Such differences become particularly acute when translation occurs not only across time but also between media, as is the case with the Roman mural representation of Greek panel painting. To return to Winckelmann, and the passage with which the chapter opened, this basic tension, I propose, is key to the apparently paradoxical handling of the Herculaneum paintings in the *History*.

Winckelmann was well acquainted with the historiographical tradition extolling painted panels. But he knew equally well that none such panels had survived to the eighteenth century.⁹² Winckelmann explicitly notes that the Herculaneum paintings were fragments of larger murals, and although they were found already excised from their original context he appears to have been sensitive to the integrity of such mural compositions; in the report from Herculaneum he seems to chastise the Bourbon excavators for destroying sections of murals that they were unable to remove from the wall.⁹³ At no point does he directly claim that any of the four excised pictures were actually executed by one of the canonical Greek painters, yet he implies that they may as well have been famous Greek panel paintings.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ See e.g. Zanker 1988; Hölscher 2004; 2006; Elsner 2006; Hallett 2015.

⁹¹ Still fundamental on this difference are the comments in Schapiro 1969, on the relation of art to text more generally see e.g. Goldhill and Osborne 1994; Elsner 1996; Prioux 2008; Squire 2009; Elsner and Meyer 2014.

⁹² Winckelmann 2006: 251–252; cf. 1764a Pt.1.Chpt. 4.Sect.5.1, 264.

⁹³ Mattusch 2011: 43–44; Winckelmann 2011: 184; 1764b: 32.

⁹⁴ In a later passage, Winckelmann appears to assert that a Greek artist must have executed the Herculaneum paintings because the kneeling woman in the painting of the “Actor King” is shown writing out a signature in Greek (Winckelmann 2006: 260; cf. 1764a: Pt.1.Chpt. 4.

It is worth noting, in this vein, that when Winckelmann corrected the provenance of the paintings in the later report on the Herculaneum discoveries, clarifying that that they had not in fact been transported from the Greek world, he does not then assert that their position should therefore be reconfigured within the *History of the Art of Antiquity* from a history of Greek painting to one of Roman painting.⁹⁵ The potential difficulty the correction may have posed to his larger historical system is passed over in silence. The placement of the Herculaneum panels within the framework of the *History* may thus be a slightly sentimental way for Winckelmann to navigate the strictures of his own organizational principles. But it may also be a sophisticated strategy for bringing otherwise innocuous Roman wall paintings into dialogue with the most famous works of the Classical past. Understood in this way, the passage on the Herculaneum paintings is not merely a side effect of the desire to recover lost Greek panel paintings, but a means of placing Roman wall paintings into a larger tradition of ancient art. It provides a means for Winckelmann to make sense of two bodies of evidence, one material and the other textual, whose relation is ambiguous, but, he feels, existent.

Moreover, if we read Winckelmann's passage on the Herculaneum panels as an act of reconciliation between those two traditions, we may also note that it allows him to deal with the fictions already inherent in the four paintings. Although originally part of larger murals, they were excised in antiquity as individual units. Although simple strips of color surround the figural scenes, as a visual unit those strips resemble picture frames. The painting deliberately plays upon this resemblance insofar as the body of the leftmost woman traverses the inner white border of the picture, indicating that it is a part of the architecture of the world in which the scene takes place, but remains within the thin bands of color so painstakingly enumerated in Winckelmann's description. Indeed, although we can say with some certainty that the paintings were executed in first-century CE Italy, their composition, palette, and handling of line seem to consciously evoke late Classical Greek painting, to the best of our ability to identify that style.⁹⁶ In other words, these Roman, Imperial murals originally presented the viewer with the fiction that they were Classical, Greek panel paintings.

This act of fiction is key to the painting of painting. In Latin authors, the verb *fingere* , from which the noun *fictio* and the adjective *fictus* both derive,

Sect.5.4, 281). In his initial description of that painting, however, he states that he cannot distinguish any letterforms, and he hypothesizes that she writes the name of a tragedy, not a signature (Winckelmann 2006: 255; cf. 1764a: Pt.1.Chpt. 4.Sect.5.2.C, 272).

⁹⁵ Winckelmann 1764b: 4; 2011: 165. ⁹⁶ Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: 162, no. 45.

possesses the dual meaning of shaping, molding, or fashioning, and of faking or pretending.⁹⁷ *Fictio*, in turn, could alternately denote the act of shaping, the act of pretending, or that which is pretended, the resulting fiction.⁹⁸ The idea of creation and that of falsification are deeply intertwined in this constellation of concepts; the link appears to be established in part via the visual arts. The *fictor* molds images from clay or some other material; such images resemble but do not reproduce that which they represent.⁹⁹ They are mere figurations.¹⁰⁰ To produce a fiction, in this sense, is to highlight the difference between the representing object and the object of representation.

The fictive both is and is not.¹⁰¹ This dual nature has been captured particularly acutely in modernity by so-called as-if approaches to fiction. Under these views the fictive is that which is not, but which could be, at least under given conditions, and the creation of a fiction is the act of staging a hypothetical, or as-if scenario.¹⁰² This echoes Aristotle's assertion that poetry deals not with the specific and actual but with the general and the possible (*Poet.* 1451a–b).¹⁰³ For Wolfgang Iser, the fictive exists in a dynamic relationship with reality (what we really experience in perception) and the imaginary (what we think or dream of but do not actually experience). The fictive both doubles the real through imitation and disrupts it by providing a physical form and medium for the imaginary.¹⁰⁴ Iser further claims that literary – which we might extend to artistic – fiction purposefully reveals its status as fictive; it is in this “self-disclosure,” which demands that the audience approach it differently from the everyday world, that its hypothetical, as-if nature is most prominent.¹⁰⁵

These dual valences of fiction – creation and falsification, doubling and disruption – come to the fore in a fragment of the second-century BCE

⁹⁷ See *OLD s.v. fingo*; for the first sense Cato *Agr. Orig.* 76.3; Cic. *Off.* 1.157; Ov. *Tr.* 2.489; for the second Cic. *Flac.* 96; Cic. *Off.* 2.43 Hor. *Ars.* 338. Cf. e.g. Squire 2016b: 205–206, 225–226.

⁹⁸ See *OLD s.v. fictio*; for the first sense Quint. *Inst. Orat.* 6.3.53; 8.6.32; for the second Quint. *Inst. Orat.* 9.2.46; 11.1.49, and for the last Quint. *Inst. Orat.* 5.10.95–97.

⁹⁹ See *OLD s.v. fictor*; Var. *Ling.* 6.78; Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.81; Plin. *HN* 34.76.

¹⁰⁰ On the concept of which see e.g. Auerbach 1959; Porter 2017.

¹⁰¹ An idea that stretches back at least as far as Plato. Pl. *Soph.* 239c–241e. See e.g. Vernant 1991: 164–185; Halliwell 2015.

¹⁰² See e.g. Vaihinger 1925; Walton 1990; Iser 1993; cf. Tamen 2001. For discussion of the as-if scenarios presented by ancient literature and art, and their links to contemporary aesthetic experience, see now the crucial Grethlein 2017.

¹⁰³ Note as well that poetry is also related to making or fashioning, providing a conceptual if not linguistic link to the shaping of fiction. As Plato notes (*Symp.* 205b–c), poetry understood as the production of music and meters was only one kind of making, or *poiesis*, in ancient Greece, yet by synecdoche it came to occupy a primary meaning of that term.

¹⁰⁴ Iser 1993: 1–3. ¹⁰⁵ Iser 1993: 12–13; cf. Marin 1983.

Roman poet Lucilius, a formative figure in the development of the genre of satire.¹⁰⁶ According to Lactantius (*Div. Instit.* 1.22.13), Lucilius mocked those who confused the images of the gods with the gods themselves, accusing them of a kind of stupidity or folly (*stultitia*) for their inability to distinguish the real from the fictive. Yet the language Lucilius employs plays upon both the doubling and disruptive aspects of fiction, and it further highlights fiction's connection to dreaming and imagination:

Terriculas Lamias, Fauni quas Pompiliique
instituere Numae, tremit has, hic omnia ponit.
Ut pueri infantes credunt signa omnia aena
vivere et esse homines, sic isti somnia ficta
vera putant, credunt signis cor inesse in aenis.
Pergula pictorum, veri nil, omnia ficta.

As for scarecrows and witches, which the fauns and Numa Pompiliuses established – he trembles at them, and thinks them all-important. Just as infant children believe that all bronze statues live and are men, so these ones think that fictitious dreams are true, and they believe that there is a heart inside bronze statues. These things are a painters' gallery: nothing real, all fictions.¹⁰⁷

Repetition and assonance abound here. *Omnia ponit*, *omnia aena*, *somnia ficta*, and *omnia ficta* all echo one another, and they reinforce the link between creation and dissimulation that is so central to fiction. These fictions are repeatedly contrasted with reality, which is composed of true things (*vera*, *veri*), and those who think or believe (*putant*, *credunt*) that one is the other are likened to infants. Yet the passage may be as noteworthy for what it leaves out as for what it includes. Bronze statues (*signa aena*) are products of human intention and action but dreams (*somnia*) are involuntary; indeed, in a common branch of ancient thought dreams could be messages from the gods.¹⁰⁸ Young children may err in believing that mere statues are in fact living men, but in the ancient Greco-Roman world such statues were made precisely to look like men, and as Myles Macdonnell has pointed out, in the mid-Republic the vibrantly realistic nude bronze statues of the Greek artistic tradition such as the Riace Bronzes may still have been a novelty to Roman eyes.¹⁰⁹

In the last line of the fragment, finally, we find an unusually productive crux that speaks to the same issues. In E.H. Warmington's text, given

¹⁰⁶ Conte 1994: 112–118; cf. e.g. Gruen 1992: 272–318; Freudenburg 2001.

¹⁰⁷ Lucil. 15.524–529. Text from and translation adapted from the Loeb edition of Warmington 1938: 166–167. Cf. Lucr. 6.35–41 who closely echoes Lucilius' language; O'Hara 1987.

¹⁰⁸ See e.g. Harris 2009: esp. 23–90; Platt 2011: 253–292. ¹⁰⁹ McDonnell 2006.

above, Lucilius speaks of a *pergula pictorum*, meaning a kind of covered but open-air structure built to display paintings, possibly those intended for sale, which may have been attached to the painter's studio. The expression is attested in other contexts,¹¹⁰ but in his 1904 Teubner edition Frederick Marx emended *pictorum* to *fictorum*.¹¹¹ If we accept the emendation, Lucilius would be referring to the display space not of a painter (*pictor*) but a modeler, or sculptor (*fictor*). This has much to recommend it: it would extend the theme of three-dimensional sculpture that Lucilius is clearly interested in when he discusses bronze statues. And it would perpetuate the passage's consistent wordplay, as *fictor* would evoke both the artist and the liar. But if we retain *pictorum* then yet another dimension of fiction is opened up – pictorial illusion, and the painter's ability to render as three-dimensional what has an only two-dimensional existence.

The contrast between painting and statue is pointed. Bronze is an inert material imitating a living body, but it occupies the same spatial coordinates as such a body. The fiction of painting, by contrast, has to render such spatial aspects by techniques of illusion. As attested by Pliny's anecdote on the competition of illusionism between Zeuxis and Parrhasius, in which the former painted grapes that birds attempted to eat, and the latter a curtain that his rival attempted to pull back, this aspect of painted fiction was of deep interest in antiquity.¹¹² For Lucilius to cast the idea of pictorial illusion into the complex and interlocking network of fiction, dream, and reality that he has established is to resist the resolution of the self-disclosure and recursiveness of the fictive into an easy dichotomy of true and false.

Paintings of paintings such as the Herculaneum panels and the other examples discussed in this book embody in a particularly vibrant way Iser's dual act of doubling and disruption and Lucilius' resistance to the simple binary of true and false. The embedded fictions of the painting of painting are recursive, at once dissolved and hypostatized, both merely as-if and pieces of reality.¹¹³ By enclosing these paintings within a rubric of fiction created by the framework of the mural scheme, Roman painters created second-order fictions, set at two degrees of remove from reality. But by permitting the representing plane of these fictive panels to exist independently of their surroundings they also asserted the autonomy of the fiction inside the panel. The fact that the Herculaneum panels, for example,

¹¹⁰ Cf. Plin. *HN* 35.84; Ulp. *Dig.* 9.3.5.12. Cf. Rouveret 1989: 381–382.

¹¹¹ Marx 1904: M484–489. In support of the text given here see e.g. Housman 1907: 152–153.

¹¹² Plin. *HN* 35.65; *DNO* nos. 1679; 1712. For Zeuxis see *DNO* nos. 1710–1786; for Parrhasios *DNO* nos. 1636–1702. Cf. Bann 1989: 27–31; Bryson 1990: 30–32; Elsner 1995: 16–17.

¹¹³ Cf. the discussion in Bergmann 2007: esp. 92–96.

were excised from their original contexts in antiquity and set aside for re-use would seem to indicate that the Romans took that fiction seriously.

The Bourbon excavators found the four panels from the *palestra* of Herculaneum already cut out of their original walls, but they themselves cut out and removed many other sections of ancient murals.¹¹⁴ Their purpose in doing so was in part to conserve the paintings, which often faded once exposed to the elements.¹¹⁵ The excavators also meant to collect the ancient paintings as beautiful art objects, worthy of aesthetic appreciation in their own right. As Ridolfino Venuti proclaimed in 1739, by cutting out sections of the murals the excavators could thereby produce beautiful *quadri*, or easel paintings, for the gallery of the king in a villa at Portici near the excavations.¹¹⁶ These excavators, who devoted years to the backbreaking and noxious labor of digging out tunnels in the hardened pyroclastic flow at Herculaneum and to the task of removing the accumulated ash and *lapilli* at Pompeii, were surely cognizant of the enormous and irreversible damage caused by their actions. But antiquity itself seemed to provide the justification. Both Pliny (*HN* 35.154; 173) and Vitruvius (*De Arch.* 2.8.9) had spoken of cutting sections of painted plaster off of the wall and framing them as independent objects.¹¹⁷ The four Herculaneum panels attested to precisely this practice, as did a section of fresco with Dionysiac elements from the *Praedia* of Julia Felix in Pompeii (II.4.3), discovered in June 1755, which had been taken from elsewhere and was hanging from the wall on an iron hook.¹¹⁸ Two other mural panels, already excised in antiquity, were found in Herculaneum on August 3, 1755. Weber explicitly noted that these were of the same form as the paintings that the excavators were then removing and taking back to the king's collections; the implication was that ancient practices validated modern ones.¹¹⁹

The portions of mural removed by excavators were expected to conform in some way to eighteenth-century standards of taste. Most frequently, they chose to excise figural, and especially mythological scenes; still life and landscape were similarly highly prized.¹²⁰ Like the four panels from the *palestra*, these scenes were often already marked off from the surrounding

¹¹⁴ See e.g. Parslow 1995: 31–44, 110–114, 221–222; Sampaolo 1998; D'Alconzo 2002; Prisco 2009.

¹¹⁵ Sanucci 1992: 111.

¹¹⁶ “Si taglieranno, e se ne farà tanti bei quadri per la Galleria del Re.” Quoted in the frontispiece to D'Alconzo 2002; cf. Nava, Paris, and Friggeri 2007: 75.

¹¹⁷ D'Alconzo 2002: 17–18.

¹¹⁸ Fiorelli 1860: 1.23; Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: 30; *AdE* 2.169, no. 2, Pl. 28.

¹¹⁹ Fiorelli 1860: 1.29; D'Alconzo 2002: 23, no. 48.

¹²⁰ Sampaolo 1998: 72; D'Alconzo 2002: 23.

mural by some kind of framing device.¹²¹ They were already panel paintings, albeit fictive ones. By excising them from the wall, the excavators were simply literalizing the fiction. By then hanging them as *quadri* in the king's gallery at Portici, however, they introduced a third term to the equation: the modern artwork. In the royal gallery, a space normally dedicated to the display of panels and canvases of the Renaissance and later, both Roman mural and Greek panel were subsumed to the modern painting as work of art.

Hence, perhaps, the indeterminacy of Winckelmann's treatment of the four Herculaneum paintings. Were they panels or murals? Greek or Roman? Functional or aesthetic objects? How did these antiquities relate to contemporary artistic practice? Although Winckelmann speaks little of modern art in the *History of the Art of Antiquity*, he had previously asserted that contemporary sculptors and painters should take ancient Greek art as their primary source of inspiration.¹²² If the Herculaneum panels truly proved the greatness of the Greek masters of the Classical period, were they then models for modern artists to imitate? Or, displayed in the king's gallery, were these ancient paintings somehow already modern artworks? At the end of the nineteenth century, the painter Lawrence Alma-Tadema would more explicitly take this last step, producing depictions of ancient domestic interiors which combined archaeologically precise observations of artworks recovered from Campania with fanciful reconstructions of the settings for, and behaviors around, such artworks. These depictions, accordingly, implied that the ancient viewer was a more or less precise analogue to Alma-Tadema's own Victorian audience.¹²³ The text of the *History of the Art of Antiquity* does not explicitly resolve the tension between historicism and aestheticization. The Herculaneum paintings remain in art-historical limbo, their place in the narrative of artistic development in the ancient Mediterranean ambiguous.

This is but a single passage, occupying only a few pages in a much larger and more complex narrative, the premise of which would later be subject to revision. But in many ways the ambiguity in Winckelmann's approach to the Herculaneum paintings in the *History* set the tone for the study of Roman wall painting for centuries to come. Neither the relationship

¹²¹ At times the excavators merely removed the figural scene with its immediate frame, at times they removed larger sections of a mural including a figural scene, its frame, and most often, part of the fictive architectural context within which the scene had been displayed. For the variety of approaches see Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: *passim*.

¹²² Winckelmann 1987.

¹²³ Prettejohn 2002; Tanner 2006: 1–3; Squire 2010b: 133–137; 2017: 189–194; cf. Beard and Henderson 2001: esp. 1–9.

between the Greek panel and the Roman wall nor the relative Greekness of Roman painting has ever been resolved. A scholarly tendency to excise, whether physically or conceptually, parts of Roman wall paintings remains in tension with a tendency to view the decorative ensembles of entire houses as coherent programs. The reconstruction of the life of the ancient inhabitants of Pompeii and Herculaneum, and the consideration of Roman murals as holistic compositions, increasingly came to dominate archaeological interest in those sites over the nineteenth century, but excavators also continued to prise paintings off walls and to treat the figural scenes, especially those contained within the frames of fictive panels, as independent entities.¹²⁴

The Four Styles and the Spaces of Roman Painting

Perhaps the most radical and significant intervention into this dialectic of excision and inclusion was that of August Mau, who in the late nineteenth century devised a chronological system – that of the so-called Four Pompeian Styles, still in common use today – which took the representation of space as the primary, even generative framework for the analysis of Roman mural painting.¹²⁵ Mau equipped his styles with descriptive titles; they now tend to be known simply by their ordinal numbers. First Style painting, as in the representation of masonry courses in the entry hall of the Samnite House in Herculaneum ([Figure 1.5](#)), was a projective, even sculptural style of painting.¹²⁶ The style first developed in the Hellenistic Greek world; by the later second century BCE it was common on the Italian peninsula. The illusionism of the First Style is largely material. Through the optical effects of pigment and the sculptural effects of plaster moldings,

¹²⁴ Compare e.g. Mazois 1824–1838; Gell 1832; Raoul-Rochette 1867, with Helbig 1868, which focuses on central figural compositions. For the excision of figural paintings see for instance the House of the Tragic Poet (VI.8.3), excavated in 1824–1825; the House of Meleager (VI.9.2), first excavated in 1829; and the House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6), excavated from 1828–1829. See *PPM* 4.527–603, 660–818, 860–1004; Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: 302–321, 326–335, 278–301, nos. 118–150. The surviving paintings from the Augustan villa at Boscotrecase, including the two mythological panels now housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, were cut off their walls as late as the first decade of the twentieth century. Blanckenhagen and Alexander 1990: 1–3. See for discussion of the conceptual excision of such panels Platt and Squire 2017b: 10–11.

¹²⁵ Mau 1882b. For a brief summation of the styles see most recently: Stroocka 2007; Bragantini 2014: 359–362; cf. Platt and Squire 2017b: 10–11; 21–25.

¹²⁶ For discussion see e.g. Laidlaw 1985: 304–307; Clarke 1991: 85–93; Ling 1991: 21–22; Elsner 1995: 70–74; Croisille 2005: 43–46.



Figure 1.5 Atrium and Fauces, Samnite House, Herculaneum, late second to early first century BCE.

it evokes building practices in luxury materials, especially expensive marbles.¹²⁷ It is, on first sight, aspirational – a mimicry of a kind of decoration not economically available to the patrons of these frescoes. Yet no surviving built walls correspond to the fictions of First Style painting, and the seemingly random, abstract patterns of variegated marble on occasion resolve into figural compositions.¹²⁸ These paintings evoke a category of architectural decoration that never existed, and deliberately play on the boundary between the visual forms generated by nature and those produced by human effort. They are, it seems, less imitative than deceptive.

The Second Style of Roman wall painting probably began between 100 and 80 BCE.¹²⁹ It reached its mature form toward the middle of the century, as in the *cubiculum* from Boscoreale (**Plate 1**), executed sometime

¹²⁷ See especially Laidlaw 1985; cf. e.g. Bruno 1969; Eristov 1979; Bilde 1993; Baldassarre *et al.* 2006b: 67–74; Rosenberg 2010.

¹²⁸ Bruno 1969; De Vos 1977: 33–36; Eristov 1979: 696–697; Laidlaw 1985: 33–34, pls. 46–48; Ling 1991: 17–18; cf. Bruno 1985.

¹²⁹ Scholars have traditionally placed the start of the Second Style closer to 80. See e.g. Ling 1991: 23–24. Volker Michael Strocka, however, has recently suggested an earlier date, around 100 BCE. Strocka 2007: 308–311. As I discuss below, the dates of a number of important

around 60–50 BCE. In the Second Style, the projecting, tectonic elements of the First Style examples have been removed. The dominant marker of the Second Style is an interest in the illusion of depth behind the picture plane. In the First Style the physical plane of the wall was identical to the picture plane without any sense of further depth; in the Second Style the physical walls of the room are opened up, and the plane of the picture becomes a window onto another world.¹³⁰

Traditional scholarly accounts of the Second Style emphasize that it complemented the lived space of a room with the pictorial space of its painted decoration, articulated especially by the projection and recession of illusionistically painted architectural elements rendered in a kind of perspective. As the Second Style came to a close, and the interest in spatial experimentation decreased, the Third Style instituted a heightened interest in the surface properties of the wall, and in the production of self-contained, even precious decorative motifs.¹³¹ The back wall of the Red Room of the Augustan Villa at Boscotrecase, an early Third Style mural, illustrates the point (Figure 1.6).¹³² Architectural forms – dado, stage, colonnettes, and *aedicula* – remain legible but have become attenuated, bodiless, and despatialized. The ornament decorating those forms, such as the filigree patterns on the colonnettes, has become more elaborate and finely executed, however. Within the room's overall mural scheme, the elaboration of the physical surface of the wall bests any pretention of pictorial illusion. It does so, however, in order to focus on the large, central white-ground painting depicting a landscape scene with rustic shrines, pastoral staffage, architecture, and – in the background – mountains.

The Fourth Style, popular in Campania at the time of Vesuvius' eruption, is both the most varied and the most common of the group.¹³³ Its canonical form, as in the so-called Ixion Room of the House of the Vettii in Pompeii

later Second Style paintings are currently under debate, and the chronology may change further in the coming years.

¹³⁰ See e.g. Beyen 1938–1960; Engemann 1967; Wesenberg 1985; Ehrhardt 1987: 13–62; Moormann 1988: 92; Tybout 1989b; Clarke 1991: 78–123; Ling 1991: 23–51; Mielsch 2001: 29–66; Grüner 2004; Croisille 2005: 47–67; Baldassarre 2006: 80–154. For the paintings from Boscoreale see Bergmann, De Caro, Mertens, and Meyer 2010; Barbet and Verbanck-Piérard 2013; Platt and Squire 2017a: 102–116. For the significant portion of Second Style paintings which are not so much openings onto another world as closed depictions of simple architectural forms, essentially elaborations, albeit strictly in two dimensions, of the principles of architectonic representation set forth in the First Style, see Heinrich 2002.

¹³¹ E.g. Bastet and De Vos 1979; Clarke 1991: 124–163; Ling 1991: 52–70; Mielsch 2001: 67–78; Croisille 2005: 68–80; Baldassarre *et al.* 2006a: 155–213.

¹³² See especially Blanckenhagen and Alexander 1990: 7, 12–15.

¹³³ E.g. Clarke 1991: 164–265; Ling 1991: 71–100; Mielsch 2001: 79–93; Croisille 2005: 81–102; Baldassarre *et al.* 2006a: 215–276; Esposito 2009: 15–20. The Fourth Style has particularly

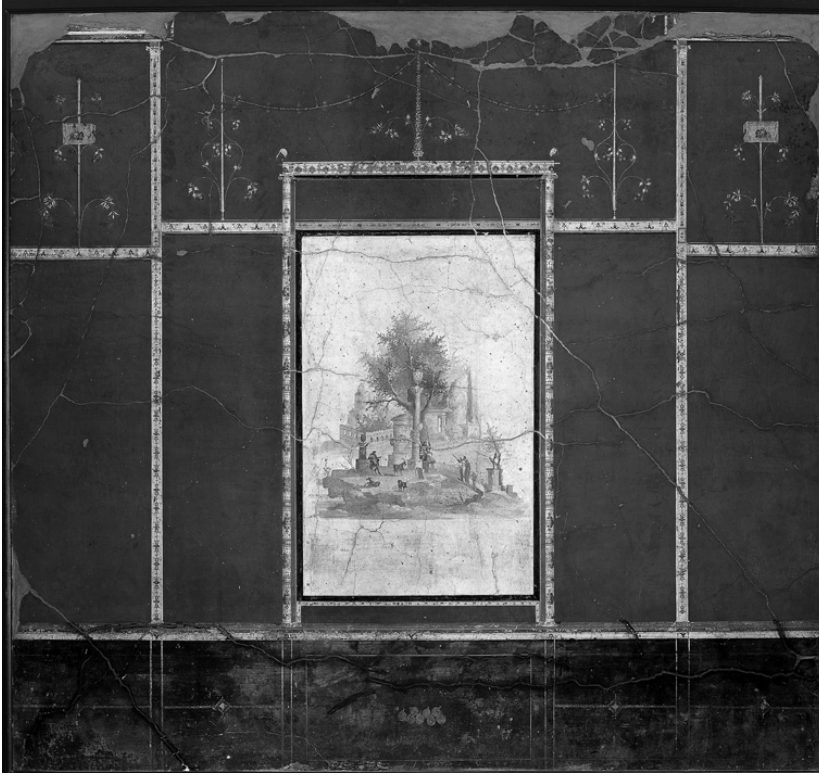


Figure 1.6 Red Room, Augustan Villa at Boscotrecase, late first century BCE.

(VI.15.1), demonstrates a thrilling and virtuoso amalgam of the prior history of Roman painting (Figure 1.7).¹³⁴ We find imitative marble masonry; convincing architectural illusions which are, however, not clearly related to one another; broad, tapestry-like color fields with floating figures in their centers; and a profusion of square mythological fictive panel paintings, including Pasiphae and Daedalus, and Ixion punished on a wheel. Although each of the Pompeian styles relies upon and builds from its predecessors, in the Fourth Style this reliance is even more deliberate and self-aware. More so than in any of the preceding styles, Fourth Style wall paintings treat the picture surface as a piecemeal aggregate of decorative patterns, *topoi* to which any number of compositional strategies could be applied.

resisted attempts to impose a precise internal chronology. See e.g. Strocka 1984; Archer 1990; 1994.

¹³⁴ On the paintings in the house see e.g. Schefold 1957: 139–149; Archer 1981; Moorman 1988: 184–185; Clarke 1991: 208–235; Frederick 1995: 277–283; *PPM* 5: 468–572, esp. 534–541; Hodske 2007: 209, cat 359; 259, cat. 360; Lorenz 2008: 234–237, 243–244, 568–571; Severy-Hoven 2012.



Figure 1.7 Ixion Room, House of the Vettii, Pompeii, late first century CE.

The articulation of the Four Styles appears to be justified, at least in part, by a passage from Vitruvius' late first-century BCE treatise on architecture, in which he discusses the kinds of mural painting appropriate to the Roman house and seems to provide descriptions of the First and Second Styles, and to point the way toward the Third (*De Arch.* 7.5.1–4).¹³⁵ But the validity of the styles and their usefulness as an analytical device has also been called into question. Jaś Elsner, for example, has noted that the idea of four independent, successive styles does not correspond to ancient ways of thinking about art.¹³⁶ And Regina Gee has argued that the styles were not necessarily discrete, temporally successive categories. She has observed that a number of apparently first-century BCE Second Style paintings at Villa A at Oplontis were in fact creations of the first century CE.¹³⁷ Some appear to have been restorations of an earlier decorative program, but

¹³⁵ Vitruvius refers to compositional devices common in the very latest phase of the Second Style, but does not seem to refer directly to Third Style painting. See e.g. Tybout 1989b: 55–108; 2001; Sauron 1990; Yerkes 2000; Grüner 2004: 218–284; Leach 2004: 133; La Rocca 2008a: 240–242; Platt 2009: 40–74; Nichols 2017: 130–162.

¹³⁶ Elsner 1995: 62–64. For discussion of the First through Third styles in relation to contemporary literature, see Grüner 2004.

¹³⁷ Gee 2014; 2015: 125–130.

some may have been retrospective archaisms. In either instance they attest to a surprising fluidity among the Four Styles.

For all that, however, the force of Mau's principle insight cannot be overlooked. The production of illusion, oriented particularly around the organization of pictorial space, provided, for Mau, the generative question with which to approach Roman painting. This approach necessitated the study of the entirety of a mural composition, and not merely isolated figural scenes, and it allowed scholars to approach Roman murals on their own terms, rather than primarily through the lens of ancient art writing and its overwhelming focus on the history of Greek art. But Mau was also deeply sensitive to figurative painting, and especially the means by which such figurative scenes were framed within larger compositions, including through the representations of panel paintings.¹³⁸ He had already recognized that the parameters of illusionism in Roman murals included the painting of painting.

Since the late nineteenth century, scholars have concentrated intensely on the spatial characteristics of ancient murals. And although Mau himself located the origins of the four styles at various centers of the Greek-speaking world, they have established that a wide array of stylistic and iconographical features of Roman and Campanian wall paintings were local innovations, specifically Italian contributions to the history of painting.¹³⁹ But contrasting approaches to panel and mural have remained in place. Another vein of scholarship has viewed the figural scenes on Roman walls as mere copies of Greek masterworks, whose historical value lies primarily in the information they provide for the reconstruction of the lost history of Greek painting.¹⁴⁰ Recent decades have seen a renewed attempt to bridge the gaps between these two approaches, with figural paintings considered not just as individual units but in relation to both their mural frameworks and the broader spatial organization of the Roman house.¹⁴¹ A body of scholarship that has been particularly important in the formation of the ideas presented in this book has considered paintings of

¹³⁸ Mau 1882b: 161–174; 1899: 453, 461–474; 1902; 1903, arguing against, for instance, Petersen 1903. According to Mau, and more recently Eleanor Winsor Leach, the appearance of the fictive panel painting within the Roman mural may in fact have played a significant role in driving the transition from Second to the Third Style. Leach 1982: 158–166; 2004: 132–134; cf. Platt and Squire 2017b: 21–25, 65–71.

¹³⁹ The most important debates are recounted in Ling 1991.

¹⁴⁰ E.g. Rodenwaldt 1909; Pfuhl 1923; Lippold 1951; Lauter-Bufe 1969; Scheibler 1994; Lydakis 2004: 192–210, 226–289; Andreae 2011; 2014, with discussion in, e.g., Ling 1991: 128–135; Lorenz 2015: 252–253.

¹⁴¹ E.g. Clarke 1991; Bergmann 1994; 1996; 1999; Wallace-Hadrill 1994: 27–37; Lorenz 2008.

painting in Roman mural systems as fictive picture galleries, or *pinacothecae*, thus bringing the idea of collecting into the analysis of Roman domestic decoration.¹⁴² And, aided especially by the rapid advance in digital 3D rendering techniques, scholars have also begun to reinsert the paintings excised by earlier excavators into their original environments.¹⁴³ But by and large, the figurative has stood in contrast with the decorative, and the spaces inside and outside the fictive mural panel have tended to remain at odds.

This book does not presume to reconcile the tension between panel and mural that has been such an animating force in the study of Roman wall painting. There are many reasons for this, including the exceptionally fragmentary and disparate nature of our evidence. But what evidence does survive points to a paradox that already existed in the ancient world, a paradox in which panel and mural were both contradictory and complementary aspects of the Roman art world. I propose, accordingly, to take both Winckelmann and Mau seriously, and in so doing seek to understand how domestic murals could be both holistically conceived, spatially ambitious ensembles and the sites for the display of panel painting as independent sources of artistic value.

¹⁴² The work of Eleanor Winsor Leach and Bettina Bergmann has been particularly significant in this regard. See e.g. Leach 1982; 1988: 373–408; 2004: 123–155; Bergmann 1995; cf. Van Buren 1938; Scheffold 1952: 32–34; Ehlich 1953: 186–194; 1977; 1978; Scheibler 1994: 29–36; Scheibler 1998; Zanker 1998: 190–192; Clarke 2005; Croisille 2005: 169–192; Hallett 2005: 431–435; Baldassarre *et al.* 2006a: 140–146; Hackworth Petersen 2006: 142–144; Wyler 2006; Platt 2009; Ghedini and Salvo 2015; Jones 2015; Newby 2016: 137–227. Salvo 2018 appeared only after this book had already gone into production.

¹⁴³ E.g. Bergmann 1994; Bergmann, De Caro, Mertens, and Meyer 2010; Zarmakoupi 2010; Beacham *et al.* 2013. Here, too, however, we find unspoken tensions, not least that the excised paintings are in general much better preserved than those left in situ.

2 | Disrupting the Frame

Artistic fiction doubles and disrupts the real. It creates an illusion through the techniques of mimesis but reveals its status as an illusion through self-disclosure. Framing, an act that may take many forms so long as it seeks to mark out that which is framed as a distinct entity, is one of the primary means by which such self-disclosure occurs. Paintings of paintings in Roman murals are both fictions of fictions and fictions within fictions. In this complex of layering, nesting, and embedding fictions, however, the act of framing can alternately serve as impermeable barrier and porous border, and the boundaries between the real and the represented may quickly blur.

In the modern period, the concept of the frame has played a significant role in the discourse of aesthetics.¹ Karsten Harries asserts: “Frames represent what they frame. Such re-presentation invites us to take a second look, bids us take leave from our usual interests and concerns and to attend to what is thus represented . . . Frames may be understood as objectifications of the aesthetic attitude.”² One of the primary points of reference for Harries here is Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, in which he identified artworks as objects of aesthetic judgment, understood as the experience of beauty or sublimity, which is subjective and particular, but which nevertheless has the quality of universal validity.³

Within the scheme presented by the *Critique of Judgment*, the picture frame serves as an example of a *parergon*, a “by-work,” defined as “that which is not internal to the entire representation of the object as a constituent, but only belongs to it externally as an addendum and augments the satisfaction of taste.”⁴ The identification of the work of art as an object of aesthetic judgment has often been viewed as a crucial step toward the modernist definition of the artwork as an autonomous aesthetic object, self-sufficient and comprehensible only on its own terms. Kant’s discussion of the *parergon* is brief, but as Jacques Derrida elucidated, it seems to depend on a fundamental paradox: that the frame, while not a part

¹ For treatment of this issue with reference to ancient art see now the crucial discussion in Platt and Squire 2017b: esp. 38–58.

² Harries 1989: 67. ³ Kant 2000. ⁴ *Ibid.*, §14, 110–111.

of the artwork, nevertheless fills in a lack in the work. It completes it by demarcating it as a work, a thing separate and distinct from the world of its production and consumption.⁵ The frame denotes the work of art by distinguishing it from everything else, separating the fiction of art from the sphere of “mere real things.”⁶ Understood in this way the frame must serve simultaneously as both figure and ground – acting as a foil both for the artwork and for the world at the same time as it cuts obstinately between them.

Derrida’s revelation of the paradox of the frame would seem to deal a devastating blow to the concept of aesthetic autonomy.⁷ But even in dispensing with the idea of aesthetic autonomy, we may still be able to take the frame seriously as an aesthetic device in historical contexts, provided that we operate with an expanded view of the aesthetic.⁸ In Classical Greek *aisthēsis* could mean sense perception or, occasionally, the object of sense perception.⁹ It was only in the eighteenth century that Alexander Baumgarten associated the *epistēmē aisthetikē*, or science of the perceptual, with the study of the perception of beauty.¹⁰ Kant adopted the term reluctantly, but his formulation of aesthetic judgment in the *Critique of Judgment* has proved influential.¹¹ Today, the philosophical field of aesthetics is variously understood as the philosophy of beauty and that of art. Although no such branch of philosophical inquiry was given a discrete name in antiquity, philosophical reflection on those topics abounded,¹² and complex thinking about art and beauty permeated not only philosophical and critical discourses, but also literary and artistic production.¹³

My aim here is to deploy the term aesthetics in neither its purely theoretical nor strictly historical senses. I use it, rather, in two distinct but related ways. The first I take from Erwin Panofsky’s essay, “The History

⁵ See e.g. Derrida 1987: 61; Duro 1996: 5.

⁶ To borrow a phrase from Arthur Danto. See: Danto 1981: esp. 1–32.

⁷ See e.g. Kristeller 1990; Shiner 2001.

⁸ For discussion of the significance of the frame in antiquity see e.g. Ehlich 1953, and now especially the essays in Platt and Squire 2017a, offering a corrective to Ehlich at e.g. Platt and Squire 2017b: 6, no. 12; Squire 2017: 242, no. 120. For expanded views of concept of the aesthetic e.g. Porter 2009; 2010a; Shaviri 2009.

⁹ See *LSJ* s.v. αἴσθησις; Arist. *An. Post.* 99b35; Arist. *Metaph.* 980a22.

¹⁰ First in his thesis of 1735 (*Meditationes* §116), and more influentially in the *Aesthetica* of 1750. See Baumgarten 1954; 2007.

¹¹ See e.g. Eagleton 1990.

¹² See for sources and commentary e.g. Kirby 1996; Halliwell 2002; Büttner 2006; Bychkov 2010; Sluiter and Rosen 2012; Destrée and Murray 2015.

¹³ E.g. Pekáry 2002; Martindale 2005; Tanner 2006; Platt and Squire 2010; Porter 2010b; 2012.

of Art as a Humanistic Discipline.”¹⁴ Panofsky identifies the aesthetic element of a work of art as that which the viewer perceives “without relating it, intellectually or emotionally, to anything outside of itself.”¹⁵ This is in part an appeal to the etymology of the term; as Panofsky frames it, to experience aesthetically is to abandon oneself to the object of perception. But we might also read it as a powerful extension of that etymology. The aesthetic is whatever is peculiar to the work of art.¹⁶

I also employ the term in a second, though related sense: that of the aesthetic text of semiotic theory. The term text here implies an assemblage of signs, or communicative devices, rather than a literal text written out in a natural language. It may refer equally to a work of visual as well as verbal art. In an aesthetic text, “the matter of *the sign-vehicle becomes an aspect of the expression-form*,”¹⁷ which is to say that its physical, material, perceptible elements are an ineluctable aspect of its meaning. To take a painting as an aesthetic text, for instance, would be to assert that its meaning could not be reduced to that which it represented, but included how it represented: its color scheme, style, size, mode of display, even its frame. But this is not all. Aesthetic texts are also especially self-reflexive. They both encourage and resist interpretation by drawing attention to their own form, structure, and inherent fictions (and hence to the processes by which they were created) but, at the same time, including a bewildering surplus of communicative content.¹⁸ Aesthetic texts have the capacity to create new ways of experiencing the world, but in order to do so they must challenge or even subvert normal means of communication – they must depart from pre-existing codes, in semiotic parlance, and create their own, new codes.¹⁹

The purpose behind this dual deployment of aesthetic(s) is straightforward. It is to propose, first, that some aspects of the paintings under consideration cannot be reduced to external, non-artistic discourses. Given that they are paintings of paintings – an art form whose representational content is, at least in part, another art form – this seems non-

¹⁴ Panofsky 1955. Panofsky’s philosophical interests, including his deep engagement with Kant – prominently but by no means exclusively channeled through the work of Ernst Cassirer – are well documented. See e.g. Podro 1984: 178–208; Holly 1985: 114–157; cf. Cassirer 1990; Melville 1990; Cheetham 2009.

¹⁵ Panofsky 1955: 11.

¹⁶ For a defense of the significance of aesthetic experience in the study of ancient literature and art see Grethlein 2017.

¹⁷ Eco 1976: 266. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁸ Eco 1976: 261–276; cf. 1984: 3–43. See also Wood 1996: 22: “Aesthetic texts are unusually dense clusters of signification where staged contradictions among messages dramatize the treachery of all representation.”

¹⁹ Eco 1976: 273–276.

controversial. And, second, it is to propose that this irreducible aspect of the paintings is an important part of what makes them aesthetic texts. That is, not only is the physical material of these paintings an important part of their content, not only do they self-reflexively stage the conditions of their production within a framework of surplus content, but they do so with reference to another body of art objects – of aesthetic texts – with their own attendant contexts and codes. The double function of the frame as both figure and ground, its Derridean paradox, is not a hindrance to but an absolute necessity for such a scenario.²⁰

This chapter examines the frameworks within which panel painting appeared in Roman mural painting of the first centuries BCE and CE. It looks toward the pre-history both of the meta-pictorial act in the ancient world and of Roman figural painting before the fictive panel. The chapter focuses in particular detail on the wide variety of formats of painting represented in murals, with particular reference to descriptions of such formats in Hellenistic temple inventories. As fictions within fictions, mural panels both doubled and disrupted the already illusory worlds within which they notionally existed. The coexistence of multiple planes of representation – multiple surfaces, even if only notional ones, for the staging of illusions – meant that panel and mural were in an uneasy stasis. This stasis was negotiated by the representation of the material frame of the fictive panel within the larger framework of the mural. The panel was an integral part of the mural. But it was also marked out as distinct, and the fiction the panel contained, accordingly, aspired to an independent existence. This apparent paradox, I suggest, is an important source of the power of the fictive panel to create space for reflection on the status of painting in the Roman world.

Spatial and Thematic Frameworks

Two examples, drawn from the beginning of the tradition of the painting of painting, help illustrate their range of significance within decorative schemes. In the first, a fragment of a frescoed wall from the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum, the fictive panel is just one of a number of objects of representation. The wall depicts the interior of a room ([Figure 2.1](#)).²¹ Just behind the frame of a door, discernible from the remains of jamb and

²⁰ See further e.g. Platt and Squire 2017b: esp. 65–71; Squire 2017. For a general discussion of the frames of panel paintings depicted on Roman walls see Ehlich 1953: 202–215.

²¹ Recovered from Room g. See especially Guidobaldi, Esposito, and Formisano 2009: 131–133, fig. 93; Guidobaldi and Esposito 2010: 27, fig. 8; Moormann 2010a: 63–78; Esposito 2013.



Figure 2.1 Fresco from Room g, Villa of the Papyri, Herculaneum, mid-first century BCE.

lintel in the upper left of the composition, a wall recedes from the picture plane at a striking angle. This deeply colored red wall supports a yellow

The dating of the house's decoration, originally placed around 70 BCE, has recently been moved closer to 30 BCE. Guidobali and Esposito 2010: 57–58; cf. Capasso 2010.

cornice decorated with a floral pattern. High on the wall a small window opens on to blue sky; through the window creeps a leafy branch intertwined with a golden fillet. A painted panel with opened shutters sits on top of the cornice; it leans out into the room at a right angle to the branch. A coffered ceiling, receding in parallel to the wall, appears between the leaning panel and the frame of the lintel. Like the wall and the ceiling, the painted surface of the fictive panel appears at an oblique angle to the primary picture plane, though it remains legible to the viewer of the mural. The panel shows a woman in a grey dress and yellow mantle against a pale blue background, standing with one hand on her hip.

The extreme angle of the receding red wall relative to the primary picture plane lends the composition a particularly robust spatial quality, which is accentuated by the cross-angles of both the branch and the leaning panel painting. These project out, not directly into the space of the viewer but rather into the fictive space created by the recession of the wall away from the frame of the lintel, which is shown head-on and almost abuts the picture plane. The play and contrast of projection and recession at such unexpected angles provides compositional complexity as well as spatial depth, lending a gloss of sophistication to the depiction of an otherwise simple and non-descript room. Excavators have not yet recovered the full decoration of this wall, but it appears that the primary fiction of the painting was to create a believably inhabitable pictorial extension of the real space of the room it originally adorned. The surface of the painted wall, in other words, assumed the conceit of a plane of representation. Its fictions were of transparency and depth; it promised access to an illusory world beyond the confines of the room's built architecture. The inclusion of elements like tendril, fillet, and shuttered panel painting was supplementary to that goal.

In the second example, from Room 4 of the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii, the painting of painting assumes a more important, and more destabilizing, role. Here the viewer is presented with the fiction of a narrow stage set above a high dado and in front of a vibrantly colored masonry backing wall punctuated, in turn, by a golden cornice ([Figure 2.2](#)).²² Within that architectural setting are representations of artworks; on a spur of the left-hand wall we find a statuary group of a satyr and Dionysus on the stage, and a panel painting with open shutters placed on the cornice, depicting, in turn, a scene of sacrifice at an open-air altar. The power of Second Style illusionism has permitted the painters of the room to include the representation of other media, but it has also been

²² See e.g. Maiuri 1931: 173–182; Clarke 1991: 94–97; Scheibler 1998: 5; cf. Henderson 1996.



Figure 2.2 Room 4, Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, mid-first century BCE.

ludically exploited in the blurring of boundaries between levels of fiction.²³ The Dionysus group rests on a green base, indicating that it must be a sculpture, but it is vividly colored as though the bodies were living and

²³ See e.g. Moormann 1988: esp. 224–225; cf. Stewart 2003: 35–42.

set in a pose which emphasizes the effects of movement and gravity: as Dionysus lifts his right arm above his head in a gesture of drunkenness the satyr reaches up around his waist to support his slumping weight. We are to imagine, presumably, that this is a marble sculpture that has been painted, but as the improbable ponderation and the languid sweep of Dionysus' left leg indicates, it is one that pushes against the limits of its material capabilities.

Despite its play between inert marble and living body, however, the Dionysus group appears to exist within the pictorial space of the mural as a whole. The fictive panel, announced by the folding shutters of its frame and by a change in both style and subject matter from the rest of the mural, is less materially contingent, but in its illusionism it indulges in another kind of ambiguity: the dematerialization of its picture plane creates a slippage between painted surface and window. Frame aside, it is not self-evident whether we look at an opaque surface or through an opening in the fictive backing wall; this ambiguity is highlighted by the fact that the shuttered panel appears at precisely the height where other walls of Room 4 drop the backing wall in favor of prospects on to expanses of blue sky. Although relatively small in size, the fictive panel disrupts the larger immersive illusion of a room's decoration by offering a new representational plane and hence a distinct spatial order, which cannot be securely placed within the mural's larger illusion. The fictive picture plane and the fiction it contains are entirely outside that illusion. They may even call the illusion into question.

The fictive painting confronts the viewer with the co-existence of multiple planes of representation, and thus with an inherent competition between pictorial spaces. In a brief article from 1971, Sheldon Nodelman pointed towards this sense of competition, arguing that Second Style paintings like those from Boscoreale ([Plate 1](#)) relate materially and physically to the experience of the viewer.²⁴ Composed on essentially life-sized principles, such a mural serves as a genuine bodily substitute for the plane of the wall, which it displaces. By the development of Third Style walls like those from Boscotrecase ([Figure 1.6](#)), Nodelman argued, the viewer experiences an optical disjuncture achieved through the dissolution of the wall into continuous color fields whose physical referents are obscure and which are interrupted, in turn, by discretely framed figural paintings. Nodelman's primary concern was the overall spatial framework of

²⁴ Nodelman 1971, building especially on the ideas of Alois Riegl and Erwin Panofsky. See e.g. Riegl 2000: 389–405 (originally published in 1901); Panofsky 1991 (originally published in 1927); cf. C.S. Wood 2000: 87–103.

Roman murals, but the example from the Villa of the Mysteries shows that this disjuncture is key to the experience of the fictive panel.

This aspect of the painting of painting echoes pictorial phenomena that Louis Marin characterized as rupture and interruption, both acts of disruption of the coherence of a fiction: “The term ‘rupture’ emphasizes the ‘breaking-through,’ . . . the break, cut, or caesura that tears apart some continuity in space or time . . . The term ‘interruption,’ for its part, emphasizes the opening up of a gap, an interval, within some continuity of continuation.”²⁵ When one painting figures another painting within itself, a unique set of such disruptions arises. As a material support, the represented painting seems to exist within the world staged by its pictorial environment, but what of the subject matter it represents? And how do we attend to the relationships – whether spatial, thematic, or otherwise – between multiple planes of representation? The Roman fictive panel both cuts through the mural to create a literal space for the appearance of alternate modes of painting on the Roman wall and engenders a metaphorical, figurative space for reflection on the nature of painting itself.

In his study of early modern paintings of paintings, Victor Stoichita emphasized the act of doubling as much as that of disruption in what he characterized as the drama unfolding between a conception of painting (*tableau*) “as painted surface” and “as a practical aperture in a wall.”²⁶ For Stoichita, it is precisely this drama that lends his objects of study the quality of meta-pictures: not merely and incidentally paintings of paintings but paintings whose fundamental subject was painting itself.²⁷ Through such meta-paintings, Stoichita identifies the emergence of painting as a distinctly modern art form that performs an act of visual art theory. It does so by re-staging its own initial conditions, by its self-disclosure as fiction, which in turn permits it to comment on the nature of fiction. Stoichita’s so-called self-aware images employ internal framing devices that selectively mimic the external framing of the physical painted panel, as in Diego Velázquez’s painting of *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, in which the viewer looks from a kitchen in the foreground through an internal window, whose foreshortened joins echo the beveling of a picture frame, and onto a scene of Christ seated, with his hand raised in speech, in the background (Figure 2.3).²⁸ Such meta-pictures may

²⁵ Marin 2001: 373–374.

²⁶ Stoichita 1997: xiii; cf. revised edn. 2015: 33. Cf. e.g. Marin 1983; 1989; Bokody 2015; Pericolo 2015. For discussion of similar issues in the context of Chinese painting see Wu 1996. For meta-artistic reflection in antiquity see e.g. Moormann 1988; de Cesare 1997; Scheibler 1998; Marconi 2011; Gensheimer 2015; Platt and Squire 2017b: 59–74; Squire 2017.

²⁷ Cf. Mitchell 1994. ²⁸ Stoichita 1997: 10–15, fig. 2; 2015: 45–49, fig. 2.



Figure 2.3 Diego Velázquez, *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, ca.1618–1620.

embed other methods of representation within themselves, as in a painting of the cabinet of curiosities of Pierre Roose, which delights in the representation of all kinds of objects but is particularly noteworthy for the wide variety of styles and genres of paintings displayed within it (Figure 2.4).²⁹ Early-modern meta-paintings may also contain reflective surfaces that mirror the picture's pretensions to accurately depict the external physical world, they may represent the artist in the act of painting, or, when showing the back of a canvas, elide subject and object of representation.

Paintings of paintings in first-century BCE and CE Italy did not push as closely against the boundaries of self-awareness and self-dissolution as the objects of Stoichita's study, and they did not necessarily lead to a modern conception of painting. Yet they operate according to similar principles, and anticipate many of the developments of the early-modern meta-picture by more than a millennium. The ancient Roman fictive, mural panel literalizes the drama between painting as decorated surface and painting as practical aperture in a wall. In its historical context it marked a cut in the primary fiction of the mural as though it were an opening in the wall, but subsequently belied the truth of that cut by offering itself as a discrete surface decorated with an independent fiction. This is to say that, in a necessary precondition for meta-pictorial reflection, the Roman fictive panel reduplicates and transgresses the already fictional frameworks of its mural environs.

²⁹ Stoichita 1997: 124–127, fig. 63; 2015: 160–162, fig. 63; on the relation between the portability of panel painting and meta-representations in the Dutch Reformation and modernity cf. Powell 2010.



Figure 2.4 Hieronymus Francken II and Jan Breughel I, *The Archdukes Albert and Isabella in a Cabinet of Curiosities*, ca.1621–1623.

Precedents and Parallels

The Roman fictive panel is a particularly robust example of the meta-pictorial act in the Greco-Roman world, but it was not the first such example. Images of images were produced in a long tradition from the Archaic period onward, although the self-reflexively critical focus of such images varied. In Athenian black-figure pottery of the sixth century BCE, such as the amphora signed by Exekias showing Achilles and Ajax hunched over a gaming board, the made objects, the arms and armor of the two heroes, permit the fullest demonstration of the range of the artist's skills and exploitation of the black-figure technique (Figure 2.5). These objects, even more than the human bodies they encase and adorn, offer a field for the exploration of *poikilia*, the densely patterned and richly decorated elaboration of surface that represents one of the primary aesthetic impulses of Archaic art.³⁰

A red-figure kylix known as the Berlin Foundry Cup, produced just a few decades later, demonstrates that such representations of objects could be

³⁰ See e.g. ABV 145.13; Boardman 1974: 56–58; 1978: 18–24; Neer 2002: 33–35; Mackay 2010: 327–351; Moignard 2015: 17–31.



Figure 2.5 Attic Black-Figure Amphora by Exekias, mid- to late sixth century BCE.

highly complex meta-pictorial meditations (Figure 2.6).³¹ Produced at a moment when issues of mimesis, realism, and illusionism were coming to the fore in Greek art and in a technique which permitted the loose and fluid application of line, the vase offers a subtle and profound set of reflections on both the possibilities and limits of realism and on the capability of graphic representation to contain and reflect back other artistic modes. The exterior of the vase, a shallow, curved pictorial field, shows scenes relating to the production of sculpture in a bronze foundry. On one side we see two workers around a kiln, one leaning on the handle of his mallet, and one hammering at a cast but not yet fully soldered statue of a man, complete except for its head, which lies between the worker's feet in an almost gruesome evocation of a dismembered body. Tools, plaques decorated with two-dimensional drawings, and a pair of feet – perhaps used in the production of molds – hang behind them. On the other side we witness two workers applying the finishing touches to a colossal statue of a nude warrior by scraping and polishing its surface. They are observed by two aristocrats leaning nonchalantly on walking sticks.

³¹ See e.g. ARV² 1573; Mattusch 1980; de Cesare 1997: 58–61; Neer 2002: 77–85; Hedreen 2016: 223–224.



Figure 2.6 Attic Red-Figure Kylix attributed to the Foundry Painter, early fifth century BCE.

As Richard Neer has shown, the vase not only encodes other modes of representation within itself – both in two and three dimensions – and offers insight into contemporary views of artistic production, it trenchantly comments on the limits of realism and the often-vague borders between truth and fiction.³² This commentary occurs in no small part through a series of formal resonances that traverse the boundaries between living and represented bodies. The frontal face of the worker peering from behind

³² Neer 2002: 78–85.

the forge, for instance, echoes that of a plaque hanging on the wall behind him. The shins of his companion squatting to stoke the fire look like nothing so much as a set of greaves, and the invisible feet of one of the workers polishing the statue of a warrior are replaced at a distance by the models of feet hanging on the wall of the foundry. The vase also calls its own realistic impulses into question: why, for example, are the aristocratic onlookers produced at the same scale as the statue of the warrior but approximately twice as large as the workers who polish it? Not, it seems, as a marker of spatial distance from a picture plane, but rather to highlight differences in social class. The tondo decoration of the cup, finally, seems to confirm a sense of ironic detachment from the impulses of naturalism, displaying Hephaistos handing over the weapons of Achilles to Thetis but deferring from attempting to reproduce the miraculously rich decoration of the shield, described in Book 18 of the *Iliad* (Hom. *Il.* 18.478–609).

The kinds of objects we tend to call works of art were more than merely representations or aesthetic experiments in the ancient world. They also played a crucial role in a host of religious, political, and social scenarios. If the foundry vase seems to be primarily interested in the limits and inherent ambiguities of realist modes of representation, other objects extend their commentary to the metaphysical realm. One particularly engaging and complex example is provided by an Apulian red-figure volute krater, probably produced in the second quarter of the fourth century BCE, showing the process of painting a statue of Herakles, observed by the figure of the hero-god himself (Figure 2.7).³³ Questions of technique, the play of media, and effects of illusionism are all evident here. The statue occupies the central spot on the vase's pictorial field. It is a bright white, distinct from the reserved clay used for other figures, which indicates that it is made of marble, and is set on a high base. It shows a youthful, vigorously heroic Herakles, with unbearded face, club, and lion's skin thrown over his left shoulder. To the right of the statue is a figure in a felt cap, holding a box in his left hand and with his right applying what must be encaustic paint – a wax-based paint that was applied with a spatula-like device known as a *cestrum* and then heated, or burned-in, as the name of the technique implies.³⁴ To the left a workshop attendant places iron rods in a cauldron over a fire in preparation for this stage of the painting process. The vase thus offers a key insight into workshop practices and the application of polychromy to marble statues in the ancient world, but its interest extends

³³ See e.g. Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978: 266–267, no. 47; de Cesare 1994; 1997: 103–105; Marconi 2011.

³⁴ Plin. *HN* 35.122, 147, 149; Marconi 2011: 150; cf. e.g. Koch 2000: 41–50; Kakoulli 2009: 35–36.



Figure 2.7 Apulian Red-Figure Krater, mid-fourth century BCE.

beyond that. To the left and above the statue is a seated figure of Zeus, perhaps an indication, as Clemente Marconi has suggested, that the scene occurs in a sanctuary of that god.³⁵ A Nike figure sits above and to the right of the statue, her body facing away but her head turned back to gaze directly at the statue. Most significant is the figure on the far right, Herakles himself, with the same attributes and same general hairstyle as the statue. He is posed as though pulling up short from forward motion, and his right hand is raised to his mouth in what can only be an expression of wonder.³⁶

What is it, precisely, that he wonders at? Is it the vivid likeness of the statue, a kind of twin or *simulacrum* to himself? Perhaps: they are roughly the same age, roughly the same physical build, and identifiable by the same iconographic markers. The purpose of painting a marble statue, moreover,

³⁵ Marconi 2011: 153. ³⁶ Todisco 1990: 937; Marconi 2011: 154.

was at least in part to make it more lifelike. Yet the vase painting goes to extreme lengths to differentiate the two figures. The medium and status of the sculpture as a manufactured object are highlighted at every turn. The bright white of the marble shines with a vibrancy that is actually denied the animate god, but as the painter and his attendant indicate it is also static, inert, and subject to human manipulation. Marconi highlights that the vase reinforces the basic tenet of Greek religion that the production of statues had the power to draw the gods themselves near.³⁷ Herakles may be struck with wonder, but the external viewer of the vase does not lose the distinction between representation and represented, nor does the statue threaten to become divinely animate, to break free of its static pose and move around.

Such Classical Greek vases represent an exceptionally sophisticated set of deliberations on the nature of representation, but they are less concerned with precise spatial relationships or with the challenge of embedding their images of images within a larger environment. That challenge was taken up in earnest in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and is explored, for instance, in a relief now housed in the British Museum.³⁸ One of a series of such depictions of the same motif, the plaque displays the epiphany of the god Dionysus in the house of a devotee, who reclines on a *kline* and welcomes the god with an outreached arm (Figure 2.8). The devotee's wife once appeared behind him on the same *kline*; she has been restored out of the London plaque but is attested in other versions and by a pre-restoration drawing. Dionysus, whose appearance is based on a statue of the so-called Sardanapalus type, wears a long beard, an elaborate hairstyle, and long robes that seem to strain against a prominent stomach. He stretches out one foot to have a satyr remove his sandal while leaning back for support against another satyr. An empty *kline* waits behind him, and to the right further satyrs accompany him in an enthusiastic procession.

The plaque is particularly spatially ambitious for relief sculpture. The foreground scene seems to occur in the garden or peristyle of a house, and although the relief is shallow it shows a complex layering of depth intervals backed by the drapery of hanging curtains, which dip at one point to reveal the frame of a door. A second register above and behind shows the front and sides of a long, temple-like building framed by trees and rendered legibly if not strictly perspectively. It features a pitched roof

³⁷ Marconi 2011: 162–165; cf. e.g. Gordon 1979; Vernant 1991: 151–163.

³⁸ See e.g. Pollitt 1986: 197; Hundsatz 1987: 23–24, 148–149, no. 24; Pochmarski 1990: 97–108; Moreno 1999; Ridgway 2002: 236–239, 256, no. 55.



Figure 2.8 Ikarios Relief, first century CE.

covered in overlapping tiles, colonnaded window-like openings, and a gorgoneion as pedimental decoration. A nude attendant, whose pose mimics that of Dionysus' ecstatic worshippers, drapes garlands around the structure. Beyond the gorgoneion, the scene is full of representations of representations. Behind the attendant hanging the garland is a votive plaque on a pedestal, unsculpted but perhaps once painted, that recapitulates the basic format of this very relief. In the foreground scene a herm sits on an elaborate column base to the left of the host, and behind Dionysus is another, sculpted, votive plaque on a plinth, displaying a charioteer driving a two-horse *biga*. A table in front of the host is supported by zoomorphic lion's legs, and under his legs are a set of dramatic masks, perhaps an indication that the host himself is a poet.

There are many means by which artistic fictions can disclose their fictional status; dramatic masks like these would appear to offer a particularly forceful method for doing so, but they also call into question the seemingly self-evident distinction between the real and the merely represented. In what sense does Dionysus appear to his host?³⁹ Outside

³⁹ For the wide range of epiphanic appearances in the Greco-Roman world see especially Platt 2011. In this respect a particularly interesting precedent to the scene on the Ikarios relief is provided by the Pronomos Vase, a red-figure vase produced in Athens around 400 BCE but found in southern Italy, on which fiction, performance, and epiphany all circulate evocatively. On one side of the vase we find labeled representations of Dionysus and Ariadne, seemingly in the flesh, alongside human figures, including actors and members of the chorus of a satyr play still in costume but holding their masks in their hands, a playwright identified as Demetrios, and a centrally positioned aulos player named Pronomos. See esp. Taplin and Wyles 2010.



Figure 2.9 a) Head of Octavian, b) Temple and Cult Statue of Divus Iulius, Denarius, 36 BCE.

of purely literary examples, most epiphanies seem to happen in dreams or during the execution of mantic and cultic rites. If we are to understand the host as a poet, is the scene a mere projection of the creative imagination? A writer's drunken fantasy of the appearance of the god? Certainly the resemblance of the figure of Dionysus to an established statue type raises the possibility that the god is just one more concretization of the imagination among the many other artworks in place.

These three examples of ancient meta-pictoriality all offer complex and sophisticated meditations on the nature of representation, but images of images could be put to other ends as well. On coins, for instance, representations of buildings and statues could serve both documentary and ideological uses. On a denarius issued by Octavian in 36 BCE, for example, we see the profile portrait of Caesar's young heir on the obverse, while the reverse shows the porch of the temple of the deified Julius, its colonnade opened to display the cult statue itself in the long toga of the *pontifex maximus*, head veiled, with a *lituus* in the right hand (Figure 2.9).⁴⁰ An altar is depicted to the right, and the pediment of the temple shows the star, the *sidus iulium*, which was meant to have signaled the apotheosis of Caesar in 44 BCE. These are, as Paul Zanker has shown, all important aspects of Octavian's drive for legitimacy and political sway, deployed at a time when it was not yet clear how the civil wars would conclude.⁴¹ But even in these instances the border between reality and representation blurred. Octavian's shoulders are undercut as though on a bust portrait, a statue rather than

⁴⁰ For the type, see Crawford 1974: 540.2. For the representation of architecture on Roman coins see Elkins 2015.

⁴¹ Zanker 1988: 34–35.

a person. This temple, moreover, appeared on coinage before it was finished, and the form of Caesar's cult statue of ultimately changed into the iconic hip-mantle type that would be transmitted to posterity.⁴²

This ambiguity between representation and referent in meta-pictorial images could be exploited for emotive, affective purposes as well. On a carved sardonyx cameo now in Vienna we see Livia, the wife of Augustus, seated in profile with a mural crown and a sheaf of wheat (Figure 2.10).⁴³ She holds, directly in front of her face, a small bust of Augustus, veiled, with wreath and rayed crown. The scene appears to be set after the emperor's death in 14 CE and before Livia's in 27. It may have religious and political connotations, but it also has deeply emotional ones. Livia looks into the eyes of a representation of her deceased husband as though it were the man himself. The representation of representation plays upon the power of art to make the absent present, in this case with a kind of tenderness that is unusual in Roman art, although appropriate for the private setting in which carved gems were circulated.

Such examples of meta-pictoriality throughout the long history of Greco-Roman art attest to a wide variety of critical visual reflections on the nature of representation that illuminate a broader context for the painting of painting in late Republican and early Imperial Roman murals. Further context for the sophistication of the painting of painting in Rome is provided by the robust ancient tradition of meta-literary devices. These seem to have been a feature of Roman literature from its earliest moments. Plautus, for example, not only enacted complex strategies of translation between Greek and Latin, he also delighted in meta-theatrical gestures, playing upon the suspension of disbelief necessary to the performance of the written word in front of an audience.⁴⁴ Perhaps the most common and powerful meta-literary tool available to the Roman author was the intertext, the gesture, allusion, or reference to an earlier work through plot, vocabulary, or meter.⁴⁵ In the literature of the late Republic and Empire we encounter a golden age of intertextual practice, and in the work of a poet like Ovid, as Alessandro Barchiesi has shown, the intertext is not just

⁴² See e.g. Koortbojian 2013: esp. 45–49, 91–93.

⁴³ Kampen 2009: 23–37; cf. e.g. S.E. Wood 2000: 119–121; Zwierlein-Diehl 2007: 157–158; Hekster 2015: 120–121.

⁴⁴ See especially Moore 1998.

⁴⁵ The literature on Roman intertextual practice has grown dramatically in recent decades. See, selectively, Conte 1986; 2017; Fowler 1997; Hinds 1998; Edmunds 2001; Baraz and van den Berg 2013. For the usefulness of the concept of intertextuality for the visual arts see Fullerton 1997; cf. Marvin 2008: 206–213.



Figure 2.10 Sardonx Cameo of Livia with a bust of the deified Augustus, after 14 CE.

a detached, learned display, but an opportunity to reflect on the deepest workings of literary production.⁴⁶

Such self-reflexivity, I suggest, is equally characteristic of contemporary meta-paintings. Particular to the meta-pictorial act, however, may have been the shock of its optical disjuncture. This is perhaps partly a question of medium: even the spatially complex plaque with Dionysus cannot

⁴⁶ Barchiesi 2001.

overcome the basic physical limits placed upon relief sculpture. But it must also be at least in part a matter of intent: the non-commensurability of planes of representation is one of the ways the Roman mural announces the fictive panel as a distinct entity. It is one of its acts of framing. The fictive panel's disruption of the mural's primary representational plane is structural, a facet of a deliberate compositional logic. A wide variety of fictive panels appear within an equally wide variety of decorative schemes, in Rome and Campania, throughout murals of the first centuries BCE and CE. But why should the panel painting have held such wide appeal as an object of representation for Roman muralists? The reasons must have been manifold. The fictive panel offered a compositional solution to the strictures of Roman wall painting.⁴⁷ With their focus on the illusionistic representation of architecture, Second Style compositions typically allotted limited room to figural painting. Thus, on one level, within such compositions, fictive panels served much the same role as real panel paintings in built architecture. They provided visual relief from the potential monotony of the depicted architecture. Clearly demarcated spaces of fiction, they were both digestible in a single glance and capable of holding the viewer's attention. The fiction they offered may have been in competition with the larger illusion of the Second Style mural, but it must also have seemed controlled and contained.

First-century painters possessed other means of incorporating the human figure into their compositions. Friezes, such as those of the Odyssey landscapes, recovered from a house in the Via Graziosa on the Esquiline hill in Rome ([Figure 2.11](#)) offered one solution.⁴⁸ But compositions like this were most appropriate to the representation of long, multi-episode narratives, and I suggest below that they may have been more closely related to the traditions of panel painting than we might think. The so-called megalographies, or large-scale paintings, of the Second Style offered another means of representing the human figure in dramatic action. In the surviving first-century megalographic compositions – at the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii, for instance – human actors are painted at the same scale as the room's fictive architecture and in direct relation to the room's living inhabitants ([Plate 2](#)).⁴⁹ On the left wall we witness the

⁴⁷ As suggested in Leach 1982; cf. Rouveret 2015: 115–124. On the ways in which such figural compositions might be organized in relation to each other see for example Schefold 1952; Thompson 1960; Brilliant 1984: 53–89; Bergmann 1996; 1999; Trimble 2002; Lorenz 2008; cf. Newby 2016: 164–227.

⁴⁸ See e.g. Andrae 1962; Blanckenhagen 1963; Biering 1995; Coarelli 1998; O'Sullivan 2007; 2011: 116–149.

⁴⁹ E.g. Bieber 1928; Maiuri 1931; Little 1972; Brendel 1980; Henderson 1996; Sauron 1998.

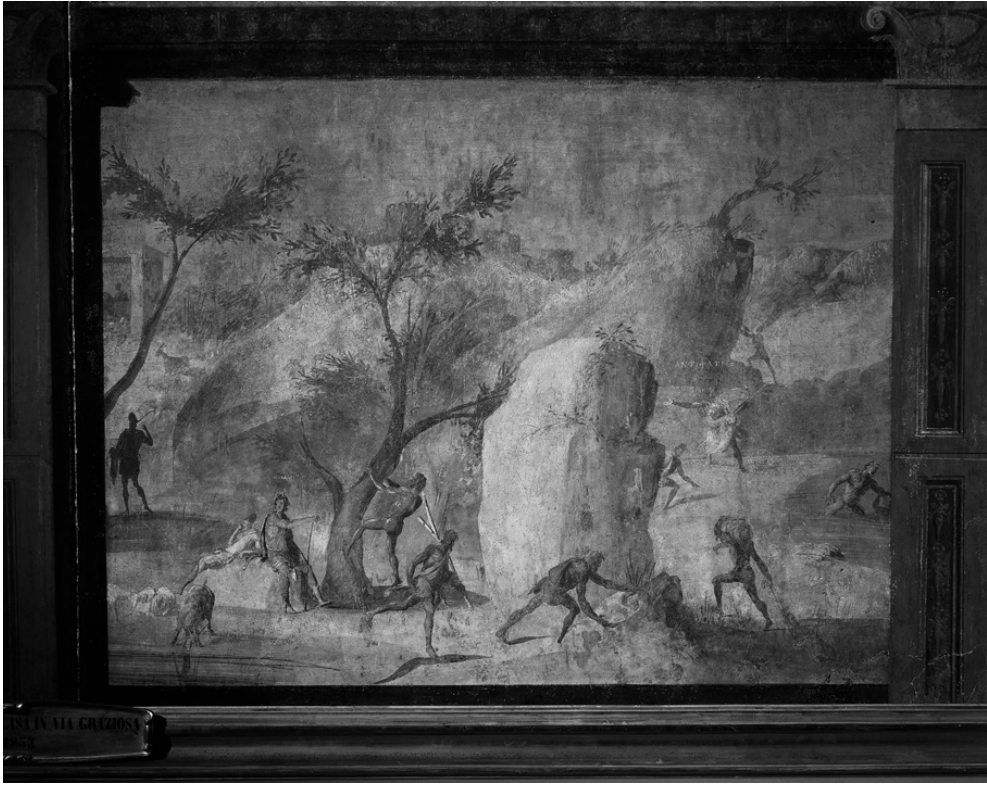


Figure 2.11 Attack of the Laestrygonians, *Odyssey Landscapes*, Esquiline Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE.

beginnings of that initiation ritual moving from left to right. A boy reads from a scroll while a matronly, seated figure places her hand on his shoulder. Next to them a young woman holding a silver sacrificial platter walks toward another group of three seated women preparing further implements of sacrifice on a table. These apparently mundane activities are then interrupted by a three supernatural figures: an older silen leaning against a column and two young satyrs, one of whom evidently suckles a goat. At the end of the wall is yet another young human woman, perhaps a repetition of the figure holding the platter, who, mantle billowing dramatically above her head, pulls back in shock from the reveling satyrs holding a grotesque mask depicted across the corner on the front wall of the room.

These figures, both human and supernatural, stand and sit on a narrow green stage resting on a low dado articulated with multi-colored marbles; close behind them a vibrantly colored masonry

backing wall prevents the further representation of depth in space. The artificiality of this compositional device is particularly striking insofar as we would normally expect Dionysiac initiation rites to occur in a rustic setting. The effect is, on the one hand, that of the performance of a play, rather than an execution of the mysteries within a believable, holistically conceived environment. But on the other hand, the essentially human scale of these figures and the more or less total dissolution of the physical plane of the wall, reinforced by techniques of illusion, the interactions of the painted figures across walls in the corners of the room, and their occasional address to the viewer, such as the woman holding the sacrificial platter who turns as though to look out directly into the center of the room, all work to blur the distinction between representation and reality. The living inhabitant of the Room of the Mysteries is given a privileged position to enter the fiction of the painting. But the reverse is also true, and the painting is uniquely poised to erupt into the reality of everyday life, a crossing of boundaries all the more powerful for the mix of human and divine actors among the frieze's participants. This vertiginous relationship between viewer and painting was suitable for some kinds of subjects, it would seem, but not all, and while it effectively incorporated the painted human figure into the mural scheme it did not necessarily supply that figure with an enveloping environment.

The fictive panel appears to cut the Gordian knot. It permits the integration of figural painting, including the placement of the human figure in a landscape setting, into the architectural illusion of the Second Style wall.⁵⁰ As the Second Style transitioned into the Third, as August Mau and Eleanor Winsor Leach have suggested, it brought figural painting into the very heart of the mural composition.⁵¹ In the large central panel from the House of the Epigrams in Pompeii (V.1.18), for instance, the viewer looks on to a landscape environment, a rustic shrine to Dionysus surrounded by vegetation, with the remains of a standing figure to the left of the shrine and a statue of the reclining god and a panther at its top (Figure 2.12).⁵² Within the panel, figure and environment coexist in an apparently stable relationship. The representation of panel painting

⁵⁰ See e.g. Rodenwaldt 1909; Dawson 1944; Peters 1963.

⁵¹ Mau 1882: 161–174; Leach 2004: 132–134.

⁵² See e.g. *PPM* 3.539–573, esp. 564–573; Dilthey 1876; Rodenwaldt 1909: 30–31; Neusch 1955; Schefold 1957: 63–66; 1962: 45–47; Leach 1982: esp. 158–159; Moormann 1988: 162–164; Stročka 1995; Leach 2004: 135–136; Bergmann 2007; Prioux 2008: 29–64; Squire 2009: 176–189.



Figure 2.12 Exedra Y, House of the Epigrams, Pompeii (V.1.18), mid- to late first century BCE. After Mau 1882: pl. 4.

did not simply make space for figuration, however. The painted panel was also a discrete entity, a figure, in its own right. The following section addresses this particular physicality of panel painting, in both real and represented forms.

The Lexicon of the Painted Panel

There has long been a tacit consensus among most modern art historians that the ancient terms for the material supports of panel paintings – *pinax* in Greek⁵³ and *tabella*⁵⁴ or *tabula*⁵⁵ in Latin – designated only small, wooden panels.⁵⁶ The evidence indicates, however, that the painted panel was a very broad category.⁵⁷ This is true even among the relatively few panels that have been preserved in the archaeological record. Pieces of a limited number of painted Archaic wooden votive panels have been recovered from a cave on mainland Greece.⁵⁸ But most come from Imperial Roman Egypt and by far the majority of these belong to the category of objects known as mummy portraits – thin wooden boards painted with often strikingly veristic likenesses and bound into the mummy wrappings of the deceased.⁵⁹

Other examples from Roman Egypt more obviously functioned as independent panel paintings.⁶⁰ These include, for instance, the first-century CE portrait from Hawara enclosed in a cross-piece frame, now at the British Museum, which may even have been outfitted with a protective cover;⁶¹ the tondo portrait of the Emperor Septimius Severus and his family, now in Berlin,⁶² and the late second-century CE panels, evidently arranged as a triptych, with a portrait of a man between two deities (Figure 2.13).⁶³

⁵³ The term may simply mean a plank or board; by extension it is a surface for applying paint. See *LSJ* s.v. πίναξ; Sim. 178; Anaxandr. 33.2; Thphr. *HP* 5.7.4.

⁵⁴ See *OLD* s.v. *tabella*; Cic. *Fam.* 1.23.3; Ov. *Ars am.* 1.71; Suet. *Tib.* 43.2; Mart. 1.109.18.

⁵⁵ See *OLD* s.v. *tabula*; Ter. *Eu.* 584; Cic. *Div.* 1.23; *De or.* 1.161; *Verr.* 1.60; Liv. 32.16.17; 42.63.11; Ov. *Fast.* 3.831; Suet. *Aug.* 72.3; Mart. 11.102.4.

⁵⁶ In Greek, such small-scale works may have been more frequently denoted by the diminutive form πίνακιον. See e.g. Vallois 1913: 290.

⁵⁷ This was recognized already by Gottfried Semper in 1860. Semper 2004: 394–395, no. 347. Semper's broad definition of the ancient panel has found relatively little favor in the intervening years, however. See additionally *RE* s.v. *tabula*; Moreno in *EAA* VI.171–174, s.v. *Pinakes*.

⁵⁸ The so-called Pitsa tablets, fragmentary Archaic votive paintings dedicated in a cave sacred to the nymphs. See e.g. Orlandos in *EAA* VI, 200–206 s.v. *Pitsa*.

⁵⁹ NY MMA 09.181.1. Zaloscher 1961: pl. 14; Walker 2000: 111–114, no. 71. It has been debated whether the mummy portraits were once independent panels or whether they were executed solely to be bound into mummy wrappings. See further Parlasca 1969; Doxiadis 1995; Walker 1997; 2000; Seipel 1998; Parlasca and Seemann 1999.

⁶⁰ In general for such panels see e.g. Gschwantler 2000; Walker 2000: 121–127, nos. 78–82; Mathews 2001; Sande 2004; Mathews and Muller 2016.

⁶¹ London, British Museum GR 1889.1018.1. Walker 1997: 121–122, no. 117; Squire 2017: 240–241; cf. Ehlich 1953: 80–90.

⁶² Berlin Antikensammlung 31329. See e.g. McCann 1968: 79–81, pl. 21; Weber 2005.

⁶³ J. Paul Getty Museum 74 AP 20–22. Walker 1997: 123–124, no. 119; Sörries 2003; Hart 2016; Mathews and Muller 2016: 106–110.

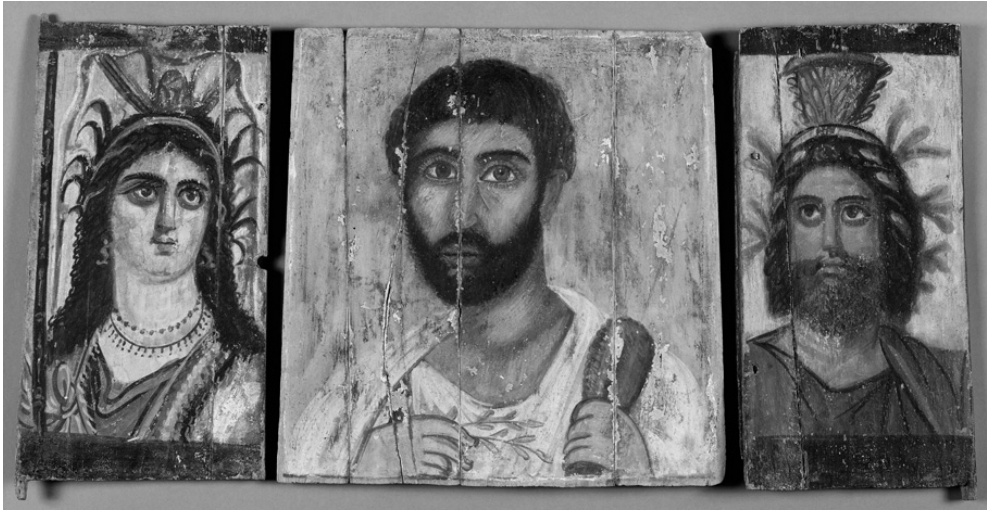


Figure 2.13 Triptych with Portrait of a Man, Isis, and Serapis, from Egypt, late second century CE.

On the central panel of this last example a bearded man with dark hair is depicted in a white toga, holding an olive branch in his right hand and a wreath in his left, against a light grey background. The area prepared for paint on the surface is set back from the edges of the panel. The flanking panels are executed in a different palette and style and depict the goddess Isis and the god Serapis. Although the original provenance and viewing conditions of the work are unknown, it has been suggested that it was once erected in a domestic shrine.⁶⁴

Wood was only one of a number of possible material supports for panel paintings. Several painted marble panels have been discovered in Campania, including the scene of the Niobids playing at knucklebones from Herculaneum, signed by Alexandros the Athenian (Figure 1.4).⁶⁵ In the literary record, both Pliny (*HN* 35.51) and Josephus (*BJ* 7.149) discuss paintings on cloth. Ovid likens the appearance of warriors sprung from the teeth of the dragon killed by Cadmus and rising from the ground to the raising of a decorated curtain on a theatrical stage (*Met.* 3.111–114), and a substantial quantity of painting on linen has been recovered from Roman Egypt.⁶⁶ And the evidence indicates that panels could be produced

⁶⁴ Thompson 1982: 46–51, no. 8.

⁶⁵ Mielsch 1979; Graeve 1984; Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: 167, no. 50; cf. Graeve and Preusser 1981. The Hellenistic painter Nikias was said to paint on marble. Paus. 7.22.6; *DNO* no. 2817.

⁶⁶ See e.g. Walker 1997, 38–39, 93–96, 116–118, cat. no. 1, 52, 56, 72, 74, 75 (London British Museum EA 74709, New York MMA 1909.09.181.8, Berlin Antikensammlung 11651, New York MMA 1909.08.202.8, Paris Louvre N3408, London British Museum EA 6715).

in a variety of sizes; Pliny often discusses the size of panel paintings, contrasting large panels with small ones.⁶⁷ One especially large panel, painted by Serapio, ran the entire length of the Maenian balustrade on the southern edge of the Roman Forum (Plin. *HN* 35.113).⁶⁸

The wide variety of formats among painted panels is confirmed by one of the richest, most coherent, but perhaps least-well-known sources of information relating to the size, format, and material of ancient painting: a set of inscriptions from late Hellenistic Delos detailing the holdings of the temples and treasuries on that island. These inventories include descriptions of every kind of votive offering, ranging from the most mundane to the most precious. Panel paintings are prominent among them. Independent physical counterparts to most of these terms do not survive, but the corpus of fictive panels in Roman murals from the first century BCE matches the terminology with striking precision. Not only do we find an attested precedent for almost every format of panel painting imitated in Roman mural decoration, the mural panels practically exhaust the Hellenistic descriptive terminology. The precision of the correspondence between the two bodies of evidence would seem to indicate a deep connection between the two corpora. But since there is no reason to believe that the Hellenistic inventories and the Roman murals were actually linked in any strict historical sense, we should perhaps infer that they correspond because they both refer to the most broadly popular formats of panel painting circulating in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean.

As the following discussion emphasizes, for all the connections between the two bodies of evidence, perhaps equally striking are the various ways in which the Roman fictive panels evade or exceed the strict categorical impositions of the terminology of the temple inventories. If the epigraphic sources seem to provide a historical framework in which to understand the formats and modes of display of panel painting in the Roman murals, the murals themselves constantly disrupt that framework, asserting their own unique status as fictions of fictions.

Temple inventories are attested in inscriptions on Delos dating to the Classical period. Only after 166 BCE, when the administration of the island had been handed back to the Athenians by Rome, however, did such

⁶⁷ See in particular *HN* 35.72; 74; 81; 112; 126; 131.

⁶⁸ Lucian (*Zeu.* 3–7) discusses a copy of a painting by the late Classical artist Zeuxis, which was sufficiently large that two men were required to move it. See *DNO* no. 1729. Pliny (*HN* 35.83) notes that one panel, prepared but never finished, which bore marks from the hands of both Apelles and Protogenes, and which Augustus eventually acquired, was supported by a machine, *machina*, but this may simply indicate a kind of easel. See *DNO* nos. 2870, 2996.

inventories begin to document objects of non-precious materials, including statues and paintings.⁶⁹ One inscription executed under Kallistratos in 155–156 BCE is the most complete in its description of paintings,⁷⁰ and others from the period help us to fill in yet more information.⁷¹ This treasure-trove of information yields a rich and varied picture of ancient panel painting.⁷² At least thirty-five different descriptive modifiers and phrases are applied to the term *pinax* throughout the second-century BCE catalogues. Apart from portraits of the Hellenistic king Lysimachus, mentioned in the catalogue of Kallistratos,⁷³ and a panel which may have been painted by the famous Classical Athenian painter Parrhasius,⁷⁴ the inscriptions rarely provide information relating to the specific subject matter or iconography of the paintings or to their artists, though unsurprisingly they often provide the names of the panels' dedicators. In his brief article on the Delian panels, René Vallois identified two major thematic subsets: *pinakes eikonikoi*, or portraits, and *pinakes anathematikoi*, panels decorated with sacral, sacrificial, or dedicatory scenes.⁷⁵

Both of these thematic genres may appear in Roman fictive panels. Painted portraits as such can be difficult to identify, but portrait panels seem to appear in such first-century CE examples as the depiction of

⁶⁹ For the changes to the inventories in the second Athenian period, and for a general index of objects in the inventories, see e.g. Hamilton 2000: 8–11, 40–43, 465–479; cf. Prêtre 1999: 389–396.

⁷⁰ *ID* 3.1417 = Mus. Del. Γ 308. The inventory of Kallistratos does not, however, discuss the holdings of the sanctuary of Apollo, which would have been the most significant and the wealthiest on the island.

⁷¹ By my count, a total of twenty-one inventories from the second Athenian period refer to *πινάκες*. They are: *ID* 3.1400 (Mus. Del. Γ 39a–b); *ID* 3.1403 (Mus. Del. Γ 518); *ID* 3.1412 (Mus. Del. Γ 679a–x); *ID* 3.1413 (Mus. Del. Γ 523); *ID* 3.1414 (Mus. Del. Γ 680); *ID* 3.1416 (506); *ID* 3.1417 (Mus. Del. Γ 308); *ID* 3.1423 (Mus. Del. Γ 527, 529); *ID* 3.1426 (Mus. Del. Γ 505); *ID* 3.1438 (Mus. Del. Γ 226); *ID* 3.1440 (Mus. Del. Γ 603, 605); *ID* 3.1441 (Mus. Del. Γ 307); *ID* 3.1442 (Mus. Del. Γ 500); *ID* 3.1443 (Mus. Del. Γ 306); *ID* 3.1444 (Mus. Del. Γ 521, 528, 604); *ID* 3.1445 (Mus. Del. Γ 587); *ID* 3.1446 (Mus. Del. Γ 524); *ID* 3.1449 (Mus. Del. Γ 515); *ID* 3.1450 (Mus. Del. Γ 234, 252); *ID* 3.1452 (Mus. Del. Γ 512); *ID* 3.1470 (Mus. Del. Γ 112).

⁷² For discussion of the terminology of painted panels in the inventories see: Vallois 1913: 289–299; Pfuhl 1923: 613–614; Fuhrmann 1931: 291, no. 58; Pritchett 1956: 253; Schefold 1972: 50; Moreno in *EAA* VI.171–174, s.v. *pinakes* 1987, 16; Gasser 1982: 7–26; Rouveret 1989: 34 nos. 69, 54, 196 89, 481; Scheibler 1998: 1–2; Gschwantler 2000: 16; Jones 2014.

⁷³ *ID* 3.1417 A.1.13–14.

⁷⁴ *ID* 3.1426 A.32: [πινά]κα [γρὰ]φὴν παρρ[ασί]ου [ἔχοντα]. Cf. *DNO* no. 1675.

⁷⁵ Vallois 1913: 290–291. For the portraits see especially *ID* 3.1417 A.1.17–18; A.1.40; A.1.76; A.2.14; A.2.51; B.1.145; cf. *ID* 3.1426 A.1.8–9; A.1.10; A.1.27; *ID* 3.1442 B.1.32. For dedicatory scenes: *ID* 3.1417 A.1.18; A.1.68; A.1.151; A.2.8; A.2.14; A.2.25; B.1.39; cf. *ID* 3.1426 A.1.11. This adjective is distinct from the predicate noun *ἀνάθεμα*, meaning simply a dedication, which can be applied to panels of all subjects and with all kinds of decorations, not just paintings. For *ἀνάθεμα* see e.g. A.1.11; A.1.12; A.1.15; A.1.16; A.1.17; A.1.68; A.1.77; A.1.110; A.2.15; A.2.53; B.1.62.

a couple from the House of Terentius Neo in Pompeii (VII.2.6), now in the Naples archaeological museum (Figure 2.14).⁷⁶ But images of single figures, such as the lone woman in the fictive panel in the Villa of the Papyri Fragment (Figure 2.1), may also have been considered *eikonikoi*. The scene set within the shuttered panel from Room 4 of the Villa of the Mysteries, in which a pig is led to a rustic altar, would by contrast appear to be a dedicatory scene (Figure 2.2). Not all the paintings listed in the inventories are explicitly labeled as portraits or scenes of dedication, however, and even within those boundaries we often cannot identify the panels' subject matter more specifically.⁷⁷

The Delian catalogues are a far richer source of information for the physical characteristics of the panels themselves than for their content. Some of the panels were said to be made of wood, but others were wrought from bronze, stone, gilded bronze, and gold.⁷⁸ Not all bore paintings; some supported relief work or inscriptions.⁷⁹ But of the *pinakes* listed in these catalogues – more than 220 in the catalogue of Kallistratos alone – by far the majority served as supports for paintings. The Delian catalogues provide us with a number of descriptive terms for the sizes of the painted panels placed in the island's sanctuaries. A panel could be relatively “smaller,” *elattōn*,⁸⁰ or “larger,” *meizōn*.⁸¹ Others were simply “large,” *megaloι*,⁸² and a few are described as being “complete,” expressed either by the term *teleios* or by *entelēs*.⁸³ Based on analogies with sculpture, Vallois proposed that “complete” in this context should rather be understood as “large,” or “grand.”⁸⁴

⁷⁶ PPM 6.480–509; Bragantini and Sampano 2009: 517, no. 296; cf. e.g. Ling 1991: 157–159; Croisille 2005: 245–253; Pappalardo 2007, with bibliography.

⁷⁷ Even when a description of content is given, it is not always particularly informative. For example, one panel is described as having a painting relating to women: [ἔχοντα] γραφὴν γυναικείαν (ID 3.1426 A.1.29), but it is unclear if the painting was a portrait of a woman, or if, for instance, it depicted women performing a sacrifice, such as was very common on Hellenistic votive relief plaques. One panel mentioned at ID 3.1403 B.1.28 did evidently bear three faces: πίνακα πρόσωπα ἔχοντα τρία.

⁷⁸ For the material from which the panels were constructed see especially ID 3.1417 A.2.15; A.1.110; A.2.45; A.2.40; A.2.41; B.1.62; ID 3.1442 A.1.37. It seems the case that, when materials such as bronze, stone, or gold are specified in the catalogues, the panels generally did not bear painting but some other kind of decoration like incision or relief work. Gilding, however, did not necessarily preclude painting, as attested by sixty gilded and painted shields at ID 3.1417 A.1.149: ἀσπίδας ἐπιχρυσούς γραφὰς ἐχούσας ἐξήκοντα.

⁷⁹ For panels decorated in techniques other than painting, see e.g. ID 3.1417 A.2.39–42; A.2.45–46; A.2.53; A.2.149; B.1.59; ID 3.1442 A.1.68; B.1.61; B.1.63; ID 3.1426 A.2.19.

⁸⁰ See e.g. ID 3.1417 A.1.13; A.1.16; cf. ID 3.1426 A.1.28. ⁸¹ See e.g. ID 3.1417 A.1.68; A.2.53.

⁸² See e.g. ID 3.1403 B.1.58; ID 3.1426 B.1.29. ⁸³ ID 3.1442 A.1.81; cf. ID 3.1426 B.1.22.

⁸⁴ Vallois 1913: 292.



Figure 2.14 Portrait from the House of Terentius Neo, Pompeii (VII.2.6), mid- to late first century CE.

It is difficult to establish firm connections between the inventories and the fictive paintings depicted in these rooms on the basis of size or material support; descriptions of size in the inventories are relative rather than absolute, and in the play of medium transfer in these Roman murals it is often impossible to determine a specific material support for the fictive panels. But in the formats and modes of display of the represented panels we can be more precise, and the overlap between the two bodies of evidence is startling. We find two main formats for the *pinakes* listed in these inscriptions: those provided with protective shutters, *pinakes tethurōmenoi*,⁸⁵ and those without, *pinakes athurōtoi*.⁸⁶ Many more panels are said to be shutterless than to have protective wings in the inventories.

⁸⁵ See e.g. [ID 3.1417 A.1.11](#); cf. [ID 3.1426 A.1.17](#); A.1.27–28; cf. Ehlich 1953: 163–185; Gasser 1982; Scheibler 1998.

⁸⁶ See e.g. [ID 3.1417 A.1.12](#); A.1.13; A.1.14; A.1.15; A.2.53; cf. [ID 3.1426 A.1.24](#); A.1.30; A.1.33.

Although these fictive shuttered panels depicted in Roman wall paintings are all relatively small, and are typically placed on the relative margins of the visual field, in at least one instance a *pinax tethurōmenos* at Delos was described as large, *meγas*.⁸⁷ Panels protected by shutters seem to be the earliest attested type depicted in Roman wall painting, appearing in high Second Style examples of the mid-first century BCE, as at the Villa of the Mysteries (Figure 2.2), the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, and in the *triclinium* of Villa 6 at Terzigno.⁸⁸ They remain a part of mural compositions throughout the first centuries BCE and CE, often in ancillary positions but occasionally, as in the recessed pseudo-*tablinum* in the House of the Great Altar in Pompeii (VI.16.15), as the central decorative element of the wall (Figure 2.15).⁸⁹ Here we may note, however, the impossibility of simply subsuming the actual mural panel to the category established in the inventory; it insistently asserts its fictional status. The painting especially highlights the materiality of the panel; it rests on two brackets that project out toward the viewer, and the two shutters are doubly articulated, folding out once away from the surface of the panel and then a second time to point fully backwards. But that materiality is curiously inconsistent with the surrounding Fourth Style scheme, and what the projecting brackets might be attached to, for example, is left completely ambiguous.

The subject of the painting, Narcissus, furthers such ambiguity. Captured by the beauty of his own reflection in a pool, Narcissus offers a model for the seductive, dangerous power of viewing, for the ability of the image to ensnare and enchant those who look upon it. While Narcissus' reflection does gleam out from the pool at his feet, however, it is not clear that his gaze in the painting actually looks at that reflection. Yet this too may be a play on the borders of representation and reality, as a basin – perhaps holding water – may once have stood just in front of the wall on which the painting was placed.⁹⁰ Narcissus's reflection is included in the painting, but the real water could not but have echoed that painted on the wall, and we might imagine the possibility both that Narcissus looked out into the real space of the house and that the face of a living person reflected back by the water of the basin echoed that of the painted youth. The combination of the overt materiality of the painting's frame and its

⁸⁷ *ID* 3.1403 B.1.58; cf. Vallois 1913: 294–295.

⁸⁸ Cicirelli 1999; 2003; Moormann 2005; Sampaolo 2005; Stročka 2005a; Moormann 2013; Bragantini 204: 318–319.

⁸⁹ See e.g. Spinazzola 1953: 526–527; Ehlich 1953: 210–211; Moormann 1988: 188; Stemmer 1992: 31–33, 46–47; *PPM* 5. 847–886, esp. 853–854, 880–881; Elsner 2007: 156–160; Hodske 2007: 168, cat. 382; Lorenz 2008: 189; 409–416; 574–575; Squire 2017: 245–249.

⁹⁰ Elsner 2007: 158.



Figure 2.15 Pseudo-*tablinum*, House of the Great Altar, Pompeii (VI.16.15), mid- to late first century CE.

ethereal Fourth Style surroundings both reify this game of reflection and representation and enclose it within the boundaries of fiction.

Unshuttered panels, *pinakes athurōtoi*, likewise seem to appear early in the tradition, including at the House of the Cryptoporticus in Pompeii (I.6.2).⁹¹ The house, excavated in 1911, provides one of the highlights of late Second Style painting in Pompeii, and is traditionally dated to 40–30 BCE. In Room 17, the mural presents the viewer with the imitation of a long portico along each wall (Figure 2.16). Doric pilasters repeat at regular

⁹¹ See e.g. *PPM* 1.193–277, esp. 201–222; Maiuri 1933; Spinazzola 1953: 435–507; and for the paintings in the cryptoporticus especially Aurigemma 1953: 903–970; Schefold 1957: 17–24; Leach 1982: 155–158; Stročka 1984: 126–140; Gury 1986; Moormann 1988: 144; Ehrhardt 1987: 17–20; Leach 2004: 136–137; cf. Lorenz 2008: 38–41.



Figure 2.16 Room 17, House of the Cryptoporticus, Pompeii (I.6.2), mid- to late first century BCE.

intervals in front of a backing wall. Herms stand in front of the pilasters; garlands have been suspended between them. Set on top of the cornice of the backing wall we find a series of figural, narrative scenes taken from the Trojan cycle. Each horizontally oriented section forms a discrete composition, distinguished from its architectural surroundings by style, format, and content.⁹² We might suppose, accordingly, that they are meant to represent a series of unshuttered panels, *pinakes athurōtoi*, set above the cornice against the backing wall of a portico; both public and private porticoes functioned as prime sites for the display of painting.

Yet the composition deliberately leaves open the possibility for other interpretations of the paintings. They appear just at the height of the mural where some Second Style compositions drop away from the backing wall to open on to a prospect, inviting the viewer to contemplate the differences between looking at a painted surface and looking through a transparent, open space. And although they appear to be individual scenes they also potentially evoke a frieze running along the length of the cornice that has been interrupted by the placement of the pilasters, such as the *Odyssey* landscapes, which seem to show a single, continuous frieze running behind a set of pillars (Figure 2.11).⁹³ To complicate the matter further, in some

⁹² On the narrative arrangement of the scenes see e.g. Aurigemma 1953: 903–970; Corlatta Scagliarini 1974: 20–21; Schefold 1975: 129–134; Brilliant 1984: 60–65; Croisille 2005: 154–165 and recently Squire 2015c: 501, 532–537.

⁹³ On the composition and arrangement of the *Odyssey* landscapes see especially Blanckenhagen 1963: 106–111; Biering 1995: 23–25; O’Sullivan 2011: 134.



Figure 2.17 Oecus 3, left wall, House of Obellius Firmus, Pompeii (IX.14.4), mid- to late first century BCE.

circumstances a painted frieze may also have counted as a kind of panel painting. The Delian inventories speak of long, frieze-like panels, *pinakes makroi diazōmatikoi*.⁹⁴ We might recall in this vein the long panel by Serapio in the Roman Forum (Plin. *HN* 35.113). Traces of organic material, perhaps wood or leather, were discovered running along the frieze on the outside of the late fourth-century Tomb of the Prince at Vergina; the excavator proposed that these were the remains of a portable frieze-like panel, presumably decorated with paintings.⁹⁵ These paintings may fit the designation of *pinakes athurōtoi* or *pinakes diazōmatikoi*, but in evoking prospects as well as paintings they may also deliberately slip from one to the other.

According to the inventories, a painted panel could be enclosed in a frame, *peplasiōmenos*,⁹⁶ such as we find with the cross-piece frame of a portrait in the British Museum, or imitated in the fictive panels in the upper zones of the left wall of Room 3 of the House of Obellius Firmus in Pompeii (IX.14.4) (Figure 2.17).⁹⁷ The Obellius Firmus murals play selectively but deliberately on

⁹⁴ See e.g. *ID* 3.1442 B.1.42. ⁹⁵ Andronikos 1984: 198.

⁹⁶ *ID* 3.1438 A.2; cf. *ID* 3.1443.B.2.51; *ID* 3.1446.24; *ID* 3.1449 d.15. Cf. e.g. Ehlich 1953: 80–98.

⁹⁷ See e.g. *PPM* 10.361–500; cf. Spinazzola 1953: 335–365; Schefold 1957: 286–288; Bastet and De Vos 1979: 53; Bragantini and De Vos 1982: 50–53; Ehrhardt 1987: 20–23; Moormann 1988: 219–220.

ideas of framing; the left wall as a whole displays the common Second Style conceit of a theatrical building with a tall dado supporting a narrow stage from which paired columns and pillars rise to hold up a coffered roof. A red backing wall takes up the majority of the visual field. Above the backing wall, in the central section of the picture, is a curved exedra decorated with fillets and silver and gold vessels. In the sections to the immediate left and right of the exedra the backing wall drops away to reveal the receding lines of a colonnade, partially hidden, in turn, by curving black curtains. Beyond these prospects the viewer encounters dramatic masks that emphasize the scene's theatrical connotations and, on the furthest edges of the wall, projecting wings that shielded the enframed panel paintings. Although now heavily worn, a figure of a woman was once placed in the very center of the wall. Rather than standing on the stage, however, the figure appears to have been represented as though painted directly onto the backing wall, still a representation of a representation but one not enclosed within the rubric of a framed panel painting.

Other panels recorded on Delos were pierced, *tetrapēmenos*.⁹⁸ If this term corresponds to a fictive picture from the Third Style decoration of the villa at Castel di Guido, a large, tapestry-like panel hanging on elaborate hooks pushed into its upper corners, it refers to a method of displaying the panel, rather than a kind of decoration.⁹⁹ Still other panels were hung or suspended by a cord, *ērtēmenoi*,¹⁰⁰ such as the depiction of fictive shuttered panels hanging from nails by string at the House of the Vestals in Pompeii (VI.1.7), now lost but preserved in a nineteenth-century representation (Figure 2.18).¹⁰¹ These hanging panels also appear to rest on brackets projecting from the wall, perhaps corresponding to the designation *pros tō toichō*, or against the wall.¹⁰² Yet other panels in the Delian inventories were set into ceiling coffers, *orophikoi*.¹⁰³ Parallels of this type in Roman murals are difficult to adduce, but may be represented in ceiling decoration from Nero's Domus Aurea in Rome, where a central painted scene depicting Achilles on Skyros is surrounded by a carefully delineated, raised stucco frame (Figure 2.19).¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ ID 3.1438 A.3. ⁹⁹ Moormann 2010b.

¹⁰⁰ See e.g. ID 3.1417 A.1.14; A.1.16; cf. ID 3.1426 B.1.23.

¹⁰¹ PPM 4.5–49, esp. 27–28; Spinazzola 1953: 527–531; Squire 2017: 249; cf. Ehlich 1953: 203–205. Note that other shuttered panels appear to be appended to columns; these may correspond to the στυλοπινάκια decorating the temple of Apollonis on Cyzicus discussed in the opening lines of Book 3 of the Greek Anthology (*Anth. Pal.* 3.proem).

¹⁰² See e.g. ID 3.1442 B.1.32; B.1.35; ID 3.1426 A.1.22.

¹⁰³ See e.g. ID 3.1417 A.2.17; cf. ID 3.1442 B.1.32–33.

¹⁰⁴ Iacopi 1999: 51–72; Segala and Sciortino 1999: 85–90; Meyboom and Moorman 2013: 228–230. See additionally the fourth-century CE painted ceiling from Trier depicting illusionistic coffers inset with figurative panels. Rose 2006, with bibliography.

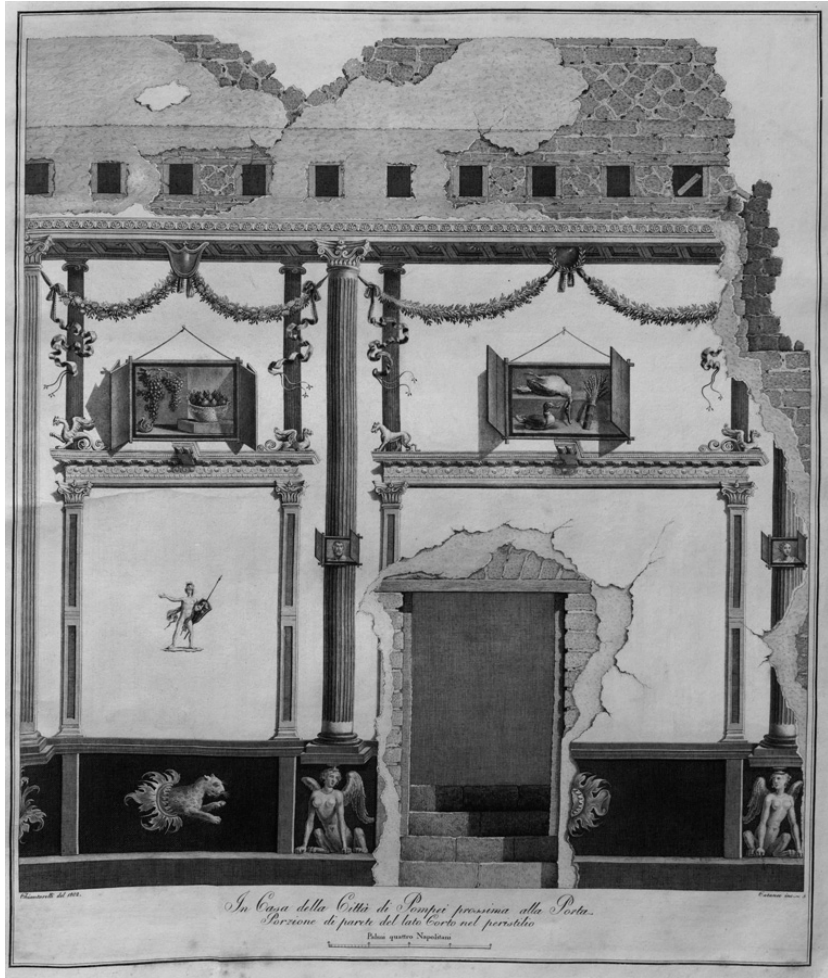


Figure 2.18 House of the Vestals, Pompeii (VI.1.7), mid- to late first century CE. Designed by Giuseppe Chiantarelli 1802, engraved by Carlo Cataneo.

The inventories further attest to painted panels displayed on top of bases, *epi baseōs*, a format found in numerous Roman wall paintings.¹⁰⁵ In the Third Style painting of the *tablinum* of the House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto in Pompeii (V.4.a), those bases take the form of elaborate candelabra on the wings of the wall, which support delicately framed landscapes (Plate 3).¹⁰⁶ These bases rest on narrow stages and project

¹⁰⁵ See e.g. *ID* 3.1417 A.1.11–12. Cf. Ehlich 1953: 205–208.

¹⁰⁶ *PPM* 3.966–1029, esp. 1009–1020; cf. Moorman 1988: 166–167; Clarke 1991: 146–158; Peters 1993: 182–199; Peters and Moormann 1995; Leach 2004: 176–185; Bergmann 2014: esp. 257–258; Squire 2017: 218–220.



Figure 2.19 Room of Achilles on Skyros, ceiling decoration, Domus Aurea, Rome, ca.64–68 CE.

against a flat black background. Although the means by which the panels have been appended to the bases is not clarified, and a sense of actual physical reality is difficult to reconstruct, the candelabra do act as bases, especially in comparison with the central picture on the wall showing the procession of Dionysus and celebrants, which is framed but not obviously supported by any physical device.¹⁰⁷

Such a painting may correspond, however, to one of the most intriguing terms applied to panels in the Delian catalogues: *emblētos*, or embedded.¹⁰⁸ The term *emblēma* often referred to embossed decoration in metalwork,¹⁰⁹ but the inventories explicitly say that these panels bore paintings.¹¹⁰ In Latin authors, *emblemata* came to be used to mean a discrete figural scene set within a larger mosaic.¹¹¹ Numerous surviving examples attest to the means by which such mosaic *emblemata* were produced and disseminated: deftly composed figural scenes worked in exceptionally delicate *opus vermiculatum* would be laid in a small tray of marble or terracotta, presumably in a specialized workshop rather than on site. This figural decoration, then, would be laid into a space reserved in the center of a larger floor

¹⁰⁷ See e.g. Hodske 2007: 164, cat. 168; Lorenz 2008: 116–118, 264–269, 548.

¹⁰⁸ See e.g. ID 3.1417 A.2.36; B.2.63; cf. ID 3.1426 B.2.39–40; ID 3.1442 B.1.38.

¹⁰⁹ See LSJ s.v. ἐμβλημα; Dio Cass. 57.15. In Latin, *emblemata* could refer to an embossed design or even gemstone set into a larger piece of jewelry. See Digest 34.2.17; cf. Cic. Verr. 2.4.54.

¹¹⁰ E.g. ID 3.1417 A.2.36–37: πίνακας ἐμβλήτους γραφάς έχοντας.

¹¹¹ E.g. Lucil. 85M; Varr. *De re rust.* 3.24.



Figure 2.20 Room 20, floor mosaic, House of the Labyrinth, Pompeii (VI.11.10), mid-to late first century BCE.

mosaic composed of larger, more coarsely arranged tesserae. An example still *in situ* may be found in the mosaic in Room 42 of the House of the Labyrinth in Pompeii (VI.11.10) showing in its *emblema* the struggle between Theseus and the Minotaur (Figure 2.20).¹¹² The central image points toward a desire for mimetic persuasion. The bodies of the two antagonists in the foreground twist in complex, overlapping movements, observed by a group of concerned figures to the right, and in the left background we see the form of an arch set askew to the primary representational plane. The greater part of the mosaic, worked in relatively large tesserae, is of a labyrinthine pattern, a kind of abstraction of the maze built by Daedalus within which the minotaur was trapped and which Theseus

¹¹² PPM 5.1–70, esp. 37–38; Strocka 1991: 42–44; Platt and Squire 2017b: 57–58; cf. Daszewski 1977.

navigated only with Ariadne's aid.¹¹³ The inner scene thematically complements but visually disrupts its larger framework. Executed in exceptionally fine tesserae and marked out by a prominent frame, it also obeys a realist visual logic that stands in stark contrast to the abstract labyrinth that surrounds it.

On the basis of comparison with mosaics like this, we might propose that the painted *pinax emblētos* was an independent panel painting, which was physically inserted into some larger framework. Among such panels we should likely include that of the knucklebones players from Herculaneum, which is beveled at the back as though for insertion into a frame, and on whose rear surface traces of a cement-like substance remain (Figure 1.4).¹¹⁴ Considering the weight of even a small marble panel like this, the support into which it was inserted must have been robust, and an architectural frame would seem most likely. In the corpus of Roman wall paintings, I would propose that the term *pinax emblētos* corresponds best to the figural paintings placed in the center of so many walls from the later Second Style onwards. These would include, it seems likely, the Dionysiac procession from the House of Fronto (V.4.a,11) (Plate 3), and the scene of the Dionysiac shrine from the *exedra* of the House of the Epigrams (V.1.18) (Figure 2.12). In most cases, a thin border running around the edge of these central figural scene, which would seem to indicate that within the fiction of the mural, the fictive panel is laterally flush and contiguous, but not materially continuous, with its architectural surroundings. That is, it appears to be precisely an independent panel painting inserted into the painted wall's larger architectural framework. These central scenes are the defining features of Eleanor Winsor Leach's designation of the *pinacotheca* style of wall painting.¹¹⁵ If we can associate them with the Delian inventories' *pinakes emblētoi*, then these kinds of compositions had precedents in real, built architecture stretching back to the Hellenistic world in the early second century BCE, if not beyond.

Yet once again we cannot posit a total elision between epigraphic category and mural decoration. As explored at greater length in Chapter 4, it is in such central scenes where the boundaries between panel and prospect are most acutely explored. In the large figural scene in the center of the back wall of Room 3 of the House of Obellius Firmus in Pompeii (IX.14.4), for example, three women prepare a sacrifice by a rustic shrine (Figure 2.21). Since the leftmost woman appears to grasp the central figure in a gesture of

¹¹³ On labyrinth mosaics see especially Moholt 2011. ¹¹⁴ Graeve 1984: 245, fig. 24.

¹¹⁵ Though Leach does not use the term *πίναξ ἐμβλήτος*, both Vallois 1913: 295–296 and Scheibler 1998: 2 propose that this is how such central scenes should be identified.



Figure 2.21 Oecus 3, rear wall, House of Obellius Firmus, Pompeii (IX.14.4), mid- to late first century BCE.

consolation, it has been suggested that this scene may show Electra and her companions at the tomb of Agamemnon.¹¹⁶ The picture is significantly larger than the other fictive panels in the room, and its focus on the representation of both figure and landscape marks a sudden shift from the surrounding composition. As the closed wall of the composition opens up onto a world beyond the house, the double dissolution of surface – that is, the evident transparency of both mural framework and embedded panel painting – threatens to bring the world of rustic sacrifice, and perhaps even the world of myth, into the space of everyday life.¹¹⁷

The practice of embedding panels into the wall is attested in other contexts. In the *Menaechmi*, Plautus speaks of a panel painting showing

¹¹⁶ PPM 10.411. ¹¹⁷ See discussion of this tension in e.g. Newby 2012: 373–380.

the rape of Ganymede *in pariete*, which could mean hanging against the wall but could equally indicate that the panel had been set into the wall (143). Pliny discusses a number of paintings set into walls of public spaces in Rome (*HN* 35.26–27). The likely fictional paintings in a portico of a Campanian villa described by the Second Sophistic writer Philostratus the Elder are said to have been on inset panels (*Imag.* 1.*proem.*4).¹¹⁸ And, finally, the *Digest* of Justinian discusses painted panels embedded into the plaster of a wall (19.1.17).¹¹⁹

From the mid-first century BCE, the space for such offset figurative scenes in Roman murals was frequently reserved during the main painting campaign, and only later completed.¹²⁰ The task was presumably undertaken by a specialist artist, perhaps even the kind of painter known as a figure painter, or *pictor imaginarius*, in the Emperor Diocletian's *Edict on Maximum Prices* (7.8–9).¹²¹ In some cases the central panels may even have differed in kind, and not only in degree, from the rest of the mural. In the course of excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum, Amedeo Maiuri identified a number of Third and Fourth Style frescoes whose central panels, he believed, had been executed in a fresco technique, but off-site, in specialized workshops rather than directly on the wall.¹²² These workshops, he supposed, prepared wooden panels with plaster *intonaco*, and then painted their scenes directly onto the wet plaster. The technique, accordingly, was identical to the true fresco common to wall painting, but the material support was an independent wooden panel. Once the plaster had dried, the panels would look like any other frescoes, and they could be inserted into a reserved niche in a fresco composition and perhaps fixed with iron keys.

Because most of the wood from Pompeii was not carbonized, it eventually decomposed, and as the wooden panels lost their integrity, so too would the figural scenes painted on them. Maiuri posited that this process might explain a number of painted walls that were complete except for their central scenes, as in Room 33 of the House of Sallust in Pompeii (VI.2.4), which featured a carefully framed rectangular hole, with a discernible lip at top and bottom, in the middle of the composition.¹²³ If Maiuri's suppositions are correct, such frescoed, but wooden panels

¹¹⁸ Cf. Hallett 2015:16–17.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Cic. *Ad Att.* 1.10.3. Cicero is evidently discussing molded relief sculpture, rather than panel paintings, but the principle of embedding is the same.

¹²⁰ Cagiano de Azevedo 1949: 145–149, fig. 9; cf. Varone 1995.

¹²¹ For the text of the edict see Graser 1940: 338–339; and for further art-historical discussion: Ling 1991: 213; Elsner 1998: 239–250; Clarke 2010: 203–204; Esposito 2011: 66–68.

¹²² Maiuri 1938; 1940. ¹²³ *PPM* 4.87–147, esp. 135–136; Maiuri 1940:148–150.

would have been literal *pinakes emblētoi*, not merely fictive ones. With our current state of evidence it seems we cannot confirm Maiuri's hypothesis, but we may recall the four panels from Herculaneum – sections of frescoed wall rather than frescoed panel, but carefully cut out from their surroundings to be re-used in a later decorative campaign.

Taken together, the evidence points to a strong conception of the central figurative scenes in the middle of late Second Style and later walls as independent panels inserted into a larger framework. The illusion staged by this kind of painting of painting was that it was really a panel, albeit one embedded both notionally and physically in a bracketing fiction. The fiction of the mural embedded panel is that of an object distinct from the wall. This stands in stark contrast to the fiction of the real *pinax emblētos*, namely, that the panel was part of the wall itself: that it has been set into an architectural ensemble to elide further framing devices. But the fictive, mural panel is already part of the wall – it is part of a materially continuous, holistically conceived mural painting. In the case of the actual embedded panel, an object of real mass and matter seeks to deny its materiality. In the case of the fictive embedded panel, the represented object announces a material existence in the absence of any independent physical presence whatsoever.

Imitation and Disruption

The case of the mosaic *emblema* notwithstanding, the Latin equivalents of the terms for painted panels given in the Delian inventories are lacking. It would be presumptuous to think that a painter or patron in Rome during the late Republic or Empire would have explicitly called a fictive panel a *pinax emblētos*, or a *pinax tethurōmenos*. The large degree of variation in the descriptions of paintings in the inventories and the occasional use of synonymous terms indicate that, even in Hellenistic Greece, there was no single, strictly defined vocabulary to talk about these objects. But the overlap between the Hellenistic inventories and the Roman murals is remarkable. We may conclude, it seems, that in format and mode of display, most Roman fictive panels corresponded to well-known physical objects, and that such objects had already enjoyed a long history in the Hellenistic Mediterranean. The significance of this point is to demonstrate the depth of first-century Roman muralists' engagement with Greek painting. That can often be difficult to track, both due to the fragmentary nature of the material evidence and due to the flattening effect of the common



Figure 2.22 Decorated sarcophagus with a painter's workshop, from Panticapaeum, first century CE.

visual language of the Hellenistic Mediterranean, which both encouraged the wide circulation of styles, compositions, and iconographic motifs and obscured the origins of those same elements. But Roman muralists also consistently refused a simplistic, documentary representation of this tradition of panel painting. They were not merely copying a set of known types, but creatively incorporating those types into their own sophisticated compositions, and they delighted in the ambiguities that incorporation entailed.

A further indication of both the power of the figure of the panel painting and the inherent instability of the representation of representation is offered by scenes of painters at work. On the painted interior of the so-called Kerch Sarcophagus, we seem to witness a painter in his studio (Figure 2.22).¹²⁴ Hanging on the wall are two round, frontal portraits, *imagine clipeatae*, with elaborate frames. Set between them is another frontal portrait, this time contained within a cross-piece frame. Another such cross-piece panel, evidently not yet painted, rests on a three-footed easel, while the painter himself prepares to paint a fifth panel, with shutters open and

¹²⁴ Goldman 1999; Fejfer 2008: 156–157; Squire 2015a: 178–179.



Figure 2.23 Fresco from Room 19, House of the Surgeon, Pompeii (VI.1.10), mid- to late first century CE.

a checkerboard-like pattern on its back, sitting on a short column. Where the subjects of these panels are visible they are all frontal portraits; what distinguishes them is their format rather than what they depict.

In an example closer to the primary material at hand, a fictive panel excised from the House of the Surgeon in Pompeii (VI.1.10) displays another painter at work ([Figure 2.23](#)).¹²⁵ As seems to have been common for representations of painters at Pompeii, the artist is a woman. She sits on a stool with a box of colors by her side and a brush in her right hand. In front of her a child seems to place a panel painting in a cross-piece frame at the base of a herm. It is not entirely clear whether the artist is working on that panel, or whether she is painting the herm itself, which is rendered in

¹²⁵ *PPM* 4.52–84, esp. 75; Moormann 1988: 168; Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: 102, no. 1; Mattusch 2008: 157–159, no. 56; cf. Ehlich 1953: 76–78.

lifelike colors.¹²⁶ The painting from the House of the Surgeon selectively plays upon the themes of surface and depth discussed throughout this chapter. Behind the central grouping we see a large rectangular space, largely faded but with an expanse of blue toward the top. Is this an open doorway? The space is framed by piers with capitals and a straight lintel, a *bucranium* and a garland seem to hang in front of the threshold, and in the distance are what may be statues or further herms, perhaps indicating that we look into the garden of a house. But the format and framing of this opening also evoke the large central embedded panels discussed above. The entire scene, finally, is marked by its frame as a fictive panel in its own right, complicating matters still further.

For all their ambiguities, Roman fictive panels tend to remain self-contained entities. To my knowledge, in only one instance is the frame of the fictive panel itself acknowledged as nothing more than a fiction, just one more pictorial element to be manipulated at will. This occurs in a fragmentary painting recovered and restored from the House of the Golden Bracelet in Pompeii (VI.17.42).¹²⁷ The representation of a square panel painting sits in a circular yellow field enclosed by a garland. Three figures placed in front of a white cloth – two women and a man – look out toward the viewer. The central woman extends her bent left arm out of the picture frame, with her weight shifted forward as though leaning out of a window. As she crosses the boundary between pictorial worlds, she reveals that boundary for what it is: a mere pictorial conceit, one of many tricks in the mural painter's arsenal. Yet the rarity of this device attests precisely to the strength of that conceit, and to the power of the fictive frame within the framework of its mural surroundings.

The paradox of the frame as a marker of artistic significance is that it both promises a pure cut, an absolute distinction between the work within the frame and the world around it, while at the same time belying the very possibility of that distinction by mediating materially, visually, and thematically between work and world. That is to say: if the frame is central to the fiction of the work, and especially to its self-disclosure as fiction, how can it be external to that fiction? And where then does the border between fiction and reality really lie? This matter is especially complicated in the representation of representation because the reality that the frame cuts through is already illusory. The beginning of the chapter suggested that one such

¹²⁶ For a scene of a woman painting directly onto a panel see e.g. MANN 9017; Bragantini and Sampao 2009: 102, no. 2.

¹²⁷ *PPM* 6.141–142. My thanks to Michael Squire for drawing this to my attention. See Platt and Squire 2017b: 73–74.

place to mark the distinction would be in the sense of optical disjuncture between mural framework and fictive panel, in the basic incompatibility of planes of representation. But as [Chapter 4](#) investigates at greater length, that disjuncture is never simple, and the back and forth between window and surface, between transparency and opacity, is never resolved. The frame is both reified and nullified in the dual act of doubling and disrupting its framework. It seems that the paradox of the frame is staged on the Roman wall as a paradox; the work is never fully liberated from the world. It remains embedded, both visually and thematically, in a network of social and aesthetic relations.

The painting of painting plays upon paradox. As [Chapter 2](#) argued, it embeds one fiction within another but deliberately destabilizes the relationship between framing and framed. This chapter explores another aspect of the paradoxical nature of these artworks: the motivations behind their appearance in the political and social center of the Roman world at the moment of transition from Republic to Empire in the later first century BCE. It examines the painted remains from three late Republican or early imperial aristocratic houses on the Palatine Hill and asks an apparently straightforward question: why should precisely the class of patrons who outfitted the public spaces of the city of Rome with famous and expensive works of Greek art have commissioned muralists to decorate their own houses with merely fictive versions of such artworks? In many ways, the ambiguities and inconsistencies of these murals made them a fertile ground for creative practice, and the painting of painting must have been attractive to both patrons and artists for the expansive arena of fictive playfulness that it created. But there may have been external motivations as well, which, this chapter suggests, revolved around conflicting impulses regulating the distinction between public and private life in the Roman world, and concern in particular the role played by the house in navigating that distinction. As both a site for the display of wealth and power and a reflection of the moral probity of its owner, the Roman house offered a unique stage for the performance of identity.

Roman writers of the late Republic and early Empire frequently characterized the public dedication and display of Greek art as a benefit to the state and the citizen body. The private acquisition and collection of such art, by contrast, was often condemned as a needless, self-indulgent luxury. Yet such artworks remained desirable, at least in part by offering patrons the chance to materially document their erudition and taste. By reimagining the panel within the context of the mural the painting of painting may have provided a way to consume the tradition of Greek panel painting without the actual acquisition of costly, independent works of art. In other words, these paintings may have allowed their patrons to satisfy the demands of both cultured taste and conservative

ethics. What we mean by ethics, of course, is not necessarily straightforward. The term originated in antiquity; writings on virtue and moral character could be referred to as *ta ēthika*, the ethics (*Eth. Nic.* 1103a5).¹ The term *ēthikos* is related to *ēthos*, which could mean both character, in the sense of the personality traits of an individual person, and custom, in the sense of the habits of a society.²

Especially in the context of aristocratic late Republican Rome, the inherently social aspect of the ethical sphere frequently also implicated the political. Political ambitions were closely tied to public perception of character; the presentation of a carefully crafted public persona was a fundamental aspect of aristocratic life. The interweaving of political and moralizing tendencies in Roman writing of the late first century BCE and first century CE indicates that this remained true even after Octavian had consolidated power, was given the title Augustus, and instituted the principate.³ The ethics of art, accordingly, revolved around not only the moral, but also the social and political uses of art in Roman society. It asked to whom art belonged and what functions it served. How should art be commissioned, collected, displayed, or otherwise consumed? What was the source of its value, and to whom did that value accrue? These questions were in dispute during the first centuries BCE and CE, and I argue that representations of panel paintings in Roman domestic murals played a part in such debates. Such paintings were, in important senses, fundamentally social, ethical, and political.

Public and Private on the Palatine Hill

A cluster of first-century BCE houses erected in the southwest area of the Palatine Hill offers an especially fruitful starting point to examine these questions, both because it demonstrates the decorative interests of the uppermost stratum of Roman society and because it occupies such a central and visible position in the urban fabric of the city. Throughout the first century BCE the Palatine remained the most desirable residential

¹ See *LSJ* s.v. ἠθικός; Arist. *Pol.* 1295a36; *Rh.* 1408a11; 1391b22; *Poet.* 1456a1; 1459b15. In Latin *ethicus* could mean moral or expressive of character. See *OLD* s.v. *ethicus*; Quint. *Inst. Orat.* 6.2.11; Sen. *Con.* 2.2.12. On ancient ethical philosophy see e.g. Annas 1993; Cooper 1999 and the essays in Bobonic 2017.

² See *LSJ* s.v. ἠθος; Arist. *Eth. Eud.* 1220a39 *Eth. Nic.* 1139a1; Hes. *Op.* 137; *Hdt.* 2.30; 2.35; 4.106.

³ On the impact of ethical thought on late Republican political reality see Sedley 1997, and on the challenges of practical ethics in first-century BCE Rome, especially as expressed by Horace, see Irwin 2017. On the intersection of morality and politics in Rome see Edwards 1993.

neighborhood for the senatorial class, as Pliny's discussion of Quintus Lutatius Catulus' magnificent house and *monumentum* (Plin. *HN* 17.2), and Cicero's and Clodius' bitter fight over a house on the Palatine (Cic. *Dom.*) remind us.⁴ Given its close proximity to the Roman Forum, the civic center of the city and, by extension, the Empire, and to the Capitoline, seat of Rome's state religion, the Palatine enjoyed a privileged position in the literal and social topography of the city. Its residents could quickly move between domestic, civic, and religious spheres all while living above Rome's primary public spaces. The elevation offered by the sharp rise from the floor of the Roman Forum to the top of the Palatine would have acted as its own framing device; for the day-to-day passers-by in the Forum there could have been no doubt that the residents of the Palatine were the city's elite.⁵ The simple topographical position of the houses on the hill was a way of blending public and private, of bringing the domestic into dialogue with the civic and religious.

In his description of the house of Marcus Aemilius Scaurus, built in the middle of the first century BCE, Pliny the Elder points towards just how complexly domestic decoration, political pretension, and the discourse of ethics could be intertwined on the Palatine (*HN* 36.5–6):

In the aedileship of Marcus Scaurus we witnessed three hundred sixty columns erected on the stage of a temporary theater, to be used for scarcely a single month, and the laws were silent. But of course the indulgences were for public delights. But why should this have been so? By what greater path do vices creep in than the public one? For in what other way have ivory, gold, and gems come into private use? Have we left anything at all just for the gods? Very well, some allowance was made for public pleasures. Yet were not the laws also silent when the largest of these columns, of Lucullan marble and as much as thirty-eight feet tall, were placed in Scaurus' *atrium*? And there was no secrecy or concealment. A sewer contractor forced Scaurus to give him security against possible damage to the drains, when the columns were dragged onto the Palatine. Would it not then have been better, in the case of such a bad example, to look out for morals? The laws were still silent when such great masses were dragged into a private house past the terracotta pediments of the gods.⁶

⁴ For the significance of the house in Cicero see e.g. Treggiari 1998; 1999; Hales 2003; cf. Roller 2010.

⁵ See e.g. Favro 1996: 43–44; cf. Leach 2004: 56–59.

⁶ *CCCLX columnas M. Scauri aedilitate ad scaenam theatri temporari et vix mense uno futuri in usu viderunt portari silentio legum. sed publicis nimirum indulgentes voluptatibus. id ipsum cur? aut qua magis via inrepunt vitia quam publica? quo enim alio modo in privatos usus venere ebora, aurum, gemmae? aut quid omnino diis reliquimus?*

verum esto, indulserint publicis voluptatibus. etiamne tacuerunt, maximas earum atque adeo duodequadragesimum pedum Lucullei marmoris in atrio Scauri conlocari? nec clam id occulteque factum est. satisfacere sibi damni infecti coegit redemptor cloacarum, cum in Palatium eae

For Pliny, it is a general trope that material opulence and moral decay are closely related, and here he bemoans the means by which the vice of luxury has entered private life in Rome. It has done so, he claims, in an unanticipated way – through public displays of beneficence, which the laws of the state have left unchecked.⁷ When the Greek marble columns of Scaurus' theater were taken to decorate his home, Pliny indicates that this was not just a needless indulgence in luxury, it rather amounted to a betrayal of the public trust, and, as he goes on to assert, a dissolution of morality and a rejection of traditional Roman religion.⁸ The Roman house was not a closed, private retreat from public life, as the modern house has come to be; it stood at least partially open to clients and visitors and functioned as the material face of the owner's public persona.⁹ But as Pliny highlights, the house was a private entity insofar as it was private property. Unlike the construction of temples, aqueducts, or, in Scaurus' case, a temporary theater, the beautification of a house, no matter how prominently located, was not a civic activity, or an act of public beneficence.¹⁰ While the construction of an impressive house might function as a demonstration of economic and political power, as Catherine Edwards has articulated, a house could equally bring opprobrium as well as prestige to its owner.¹¹

This point is reinforced by a passage from Suetonius' biography of Augustus. Although Suetonius acknowledges that as a youth he had been accused of moral laxity and luxurious indulgence, and that his lustfulness and fondness for gambling continued well into adulthood (*Aug.* 68–71), Augustus lived simply, in a modest house (*Aug.* 72):

He lived at first near the Roman Forum, above the *scalae anulariae*, in a house which had belonged to the orator Calvus; afterwards, on the Palatine, but in the no less modest dwelling of Hortensius, which was remarkable neither for size nor

traherentur. non ergo in tam malo exemplo moribus caveri utilius fuerat? tacuere tantas moles in privatam domum trahi praeter fictilia deorum fastigia! Text from and translation adapted from the Loeb edition of Eichholz 2006: 4–7.

⁷ See Vell. Pat. 2.1.1–2 for a similar sentiment that private luxury was preceded by public magnificence, although he locates this process a century earlier. Pliny does explicitly note that no law had ever been passed that forbade the quarrying and importation of foreign marbles to Rome from across the seas (*HN* 36.4).

⁸ Cf. e.g. Cic. *Scaur.* 45. On the topic of moral authority see Edwards 1993. On Pliny's moralizing approach to luxury, its abuses of nature, its place in marking social distinction, and its role in the perceived tension between Greek and Roman culture, see Wallace-Hadrill 1990.

⁹ Zanker 1979; Wallace-Hadrill 1988; 1994; Bergmann 1994; Zanker 1998: 9–25, 135–205; Hales 2003; Hackworth Petersen 2006: 123–162; Mayer 2012: 166–212; Nichols 2017; cf. Cooper 2007; Nevett 2010; Potter 2011; Zarmakoupi 2014. Further on issues of privacy within the Roman house see e.g. Thébert 1992; Grahame 1997; Riggsby 1997; Anguissola 2011; 2012b; Berry 2016.

¹⁰ See e.g. Edwards 1993: 137–172.

¹¹ Edwards 1993: 151–152; cf. Treggiari 1999: 46–49; Leach 2004: 57–58.

elegance, as in it were short colonnades with columns of Alban stone, and little rooms without any marble or distinguished pavements.¹²

Suetonius goes on to say that Augustus lived in the same house, and slept in the same room, for more than forty years, at the expense of his own health. Even in his country villas, where the public eye could not reach, and where many elites were free to more fully indulge their whims, he decorated less with beautiful works of art than with gardens and natural curiosities. The modesty of Augustus' dwellings, for Suetonius, is of a piece with the simplicity of his dress, his light eating habits, and his temperance with wine (*Aug.* 73–77). Each was an aspect of Augustus' self-presentation of moral probity, and of his outward respect for traditional patterns of behavior. His house, like that built by Scaurus just a few decades earlier, or indeed the house of any Roman aristocrat of the first century BCE, was among the public aspects of that self-presentation. And no matter how simply the *princeps* may have lived, that house was located on the Palatine Hill, still the most public location for private dwellings. Reading these two sources in tandem, it would seem the terms by which the house articulated social presence exhibited a significant degree of continuity from Republic to Principate and beyond.

It is all the more significant, accordingly, that we possess three roughly contemporary structures from the period of the late Republic or Principate on the Palatine decorated with high-quality murals marked by the frequent appearance of fictive panel painting. The most prominent and most controversial of these structures is a house on the southwest corner of the Palatine Hill commonly known as the House of Augustus.¹³ Whether or not Augustus ever lived in this house is a matter of debate. Gianfilippo Carettoni, the site's excavator, first proposed that this structure corresponded to the house described above by Suetonius, built by Augustus next to the Temple of Apollo Palatinus between 36 and 28 BCE.¹⁴ But a variety of counter-proposals have been put forth. Some scholars have

¹² *Habitavit primo iuxta Romanum Forum supra Scalas anularias, in domo quae Calvi oratoris fuerat; postea in Palatio, sed nihilo minus aedibus modicis Hortensianis, et neque laxitate neque cultu conspicuis, ut in quibus porticus breves essent Albanarum columnarum et sine marmore ullo aut insigni pavimento conclavia.* Text from and translation adapted from the Loeb edition of Rolf 1998: 258–259.

¹³ For an overview of the topography of the site see especially Irene Iacopi in *LTUR* II s.v. *Domus: Augustus (Palatium)*, 46–48.

¹⁴ *Suet. Aug.* 71–73; cf. 29.3; *Vell. Pat.* 2.81. Carettoni's excavations on the Palatine began in the 1950s. He synthesized the results, focusing especially on the paintings, in Carettoni 1983a; 1983b; cf. Simon 1986: 217–221; Ehrhardt 1987: 16; Moormann 1988: 231; Clarke 1991: 125; Ling 1991; Galinsky 1996: 179–197; Leach 2004: 94–113, 132–135.

suggested that Augustus' house lay elsewhere entirely,¹⁵ and one study has posited that the structure dates to the middle of the first century BCE.¹⁶ Perhaps the most influential interpretation is that the surviving structure was built by the *princeps* himself but between 42 and 36 BCE, when he was still known as Octavian, and that parts of the building were covered over by the erection of the temple of the Palatine Apollo.¹⁷ The original excavation notes have recently been published for the first time, however, which may occasion yet another rethinking of the complex's date.¹⁸

No matter who inhabited this structure, its decoration is informative. Paintings appear in seven rooms around a small peristyle. These late Second Style murals, although in varying states of preservation, are of a remarkably high quality of technical execution. Variations of theatrical stage-front schemes dominate the compositions, and paintings of paintings abound. In the so-called Room of the Masks, for example, we find the depiction of a simple, perhaps temporary wooden stage structure, which appears to project from an unadorned white wall covered, in turn, by a coffered ceiling (Plate 4).¹⁹ On the wings, two thin red columns support flat entablatures decorated with a green frieze. Between the projecting wings and the center of the wall the entablature continues, supported now by yellow columns, covering low red walls, each with a theatrical mask set on top. The center of the wall presents the viewer with a projecting, slightly peaked *aedicula*, supported by fluted columns.

Within that *aedicula* is a large, vertically oriented depiction of a rustic shrine, with a tall column topped by a ceremonial vessel set in the foreground, the remains of votive offerings just discernible, and in the background a tree and an architectural structure, perhaps

¹⁵ E.g. Wiseman 2009; Claridge 2010: 136–142.

¹⁶ Zink 2011: esp. 155–184. Even if the structure itself had been built in the middle of the first century, however, the paintings may have been executed at a later time. Zink (2011: 67, no. 70) credits Massimo Lasco for the observation that the remains of an earlier painting are visible in the vestibule area of the ramp room. Although these are apparently the only such examples of re-decorating, the ramp-room paintings are stylistically coherent with those of the adjoining tetrastyle *oecus* and lower *cubiculum*. Numerous ancient graffiti, which range from simple names to complex geometric drawings, were incised on the walls of the structure. Although the letterforms are generally appropriate for the later first century BCE, the graffiti do not, to my knowledge, help to pinpoint the date or function of the complex. Solin 2008: 105–116; Fuchs 2013; Molle 2014: 48–55.

¹⁷ First proposed in Iacopi and Tedone 2005: 352–378, esp. 370–375. The earlier dates have subsequently been supported in Carandini and Bruno 2008: 30–50, 138–179; Carandini, Bruno, and Fraioli 2010: 151–225; cf. Iacopi 2008: 65; La Rocca 2008a; Borello and Musatti 2009: 1–21; Coarelli 2012: 336–394.

¹⁸ Tomei and Carettoni 2014; cf. Tomei 2013.

¹⁹ Carettoni 1983a: 377–378; 1983b: 23–27; Leach 2004: 83–95; Iacopi 2008: 16–29.



Figure 3.1 Tetrastyle *Oecus*, House of Augustus, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE.

marking out a sacred precinct. This central scene is structurally and compositionally analogous to the large central panels discussed in the [Chapter 2](#), but the presence of the plain white backing wall behind and above the stage building, with its the continuity of color with the central scene, would seem to indicate that this represents a scene painted directly onto the plaster of the backing wall. That is, rather than being an imitation of an independent embedded panel, it would seem to be an imitation of a site-specific fresco, a no less guileful but perhaps differently pointed illusion.

Another string of painted rooms appears on the east side of the peristyle. The tetrastyle *oecus*, for example, shows the narrow, richly decorated central portions of a stage space ([Figure 3.1](#)), now evidently built of permanent materials but also engaged in a red backing wall.²⁰ The central aedicular structures of the room are topped by broken pediments into which shuttered panels have been set. As the central projection has grown the wings of the stage building are less evident, although dramatic masks were set on top of the orthostats of the backing wall. The frescoes in the tetrastyle *oecus* give a significant amount of space to the now-faded rectangular panels set under the central *aediculae*. These

²⁰ Carettoni [1983a](#): 395–399; [1983b](#): 54–55; Iacopi [2008](#), 63–65.



Figure 3.2 Lower *Cubiculum*, House of Augustus, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE.

central panels are heavily worn and their details impossible to parse, but the viewer retains the sense that they played upon the distinction between prospect and panel, between a view on to a world beyond the fictive architecture and a discrete plane of representation.

The significance of this device is clarified in the lower *cubiculum* (Figure 3.2).²¹ On the rear wall the central *aedicula* evident in the other rooms has been preserved, and the wings transferred, apparently, to the flanking walls of the room. In the intermediary sections flanking the *aedicula*, however, the low screen walls supporting masks are gone, replaced by a simple backing wall. On top of the entablature projecting from that wall are small shuttered panels with still life compositions. In the center of the composition is a vertically oriented central panel, whose subject is unclear, although we can discern two figures and a boat in the lower left. Further figural scenes, whose actors are placed within cityscapes, occupy the whole length of the mural from the dado upwards on the flanking walls.

Copious painting fragments were recovered from another small room on the story just above.²² On each of its three walls of this upper *cubiculum*,

²¹ Carettoni 1983a: 399–404; 1983b: 60–66; Iacopi 2008: 65.

²² Carettoni 1983a: 402–412; 416; 1983b: 90–91; Iacopi 2008: 29–35; cf. Grüner 2004: 284–294.

an *aedicula* resting on a dado and supported by two columns projects out from a backing wall (Plate 5). This stretches up to two-thirds the height of the mural; candelabra and other decorative objects rest on top of it, and behind it, to judge from the shadow cast by the coffered ceiling, is a terminal yellow wall. On the rear wall of the *cubiculum* (to the left in the photograph) the central panel is no longer legible. On the right wall, however, we see a richly colored sacrificial scene at a rustic shrine, which is set off from its architectural surroundings by a thin band of color. In the upper left of the panel is a marble statue of a deity on a base; two women and a child holding instruments of sacrifice stand in the right foreground. The statue and the group of women are separated by a winding rivulet that passes from background to foreground and cuts in front of the group of figures. The simple sacral content of the scene presents a votive scenario, but in style and format it is a grand scene, and may remind us of the large painting by Pausias of the sacrifice of oxen placed in the Portico of Pompey (Plin. *HN* 35.126). The level of detail in the upper *cubiculum* of the House of Augustus is as precise as we may find in any extant Roman wall painting, yet the refinement also serves to highlight the fact that the central embedded panels are by far the dominant elements.

Politicizing the Roman House

The paintings from the House of Augustus have provided a variety of challenges to interpreters, especially in the connection between subject matter, the imperial family, and the expression of political ideology. Political art in Rome need not have been a literal depiction of contemporary events. Although historical imagery does appear on public monuments, as Paul Zanker in particular has shown, the world of mythology could also carry significant political meaning in the later Republic and early Empire.²³ This was especially evident during the struggle between Octavian and Anthony after the death of Caesar, but it continued after Octavian had consolidated power and, with the new title of Augustus, instituted the principate. For this purpose key figures were selected from both what we would now designate as Greek myth and as Roman history. Historical men like Aeneas, ancestor of the Julian clan, and Romulus, the founder of the city of Rome, as well as gods like Apollo and Mars, could all be deployed in relation to actors

²³ Zanker 1988.



Figure 3.3 Frieze from the *Columbarium* of the Statilii, Esquiline Hill, Rome, late first century BCE to early first century CE.

in the present day – whether as patrons and protectors or as exemplary figures who provided models of behavior as well as historical justification for the exigencies of current events. This is, of course, a fundamentally allusive view of such mythological imagery, and as contemporary literature would seem to prove, these mythological figures could support a variety of other interpretations as well.

Yet even this allusive political agenda can be difficult to discern in the surviving corpus of Roman wall painting.²⁴ It does occasionally seem to appear outside domestic contexts, such as in the painted frieze of the foundations of Rome from the so-called *Columbarium* of the Statilii on the Esquiline Hill. In the extant remains of the frieze we follow the mythical events standing at the very beginnings of Roman history: Aeneas' foundation of Lavinium (Figure 3.3); his son Ascanius' foundation of Alba Longa; Mars and Rhea Silvia and the early life of their children Romulus and Remus, who would go on to found the city of Rome itself. According to Peter Holliday, the frieze was also likely executed at the cusp of the transition from Republic to Empire, a context that helps to lend these scenes a teleological political valence.²⁵ The paintings communicate a message of Roman unity and triumph; they bespeak a communal sense of *romanitas* that was both newly available to a broad swathe of recently

²⁴ Cf. Platt 2009; Newby 2016: 320–329. ²⁵ Holliday 2005.

enfranchised citizens and under threat from the same forces of change that were inexorably disintegrating the political institutions of the Republic. The heroism and virtue of the founders of the city pass on to its current inhabitants typologically.

Political messages could also appear in the painted decoration of public spaces of the empire. One example may have been the *Porticus Philippi* in Rome, constructed in 29 BCE by Lucius Marcius Philippus around the temple of Hercules of the Muses.²⁶ It has long been known that the portico was decorated with paintings related to the theme of the Trojan War, but in an ingenious – although perhaps ultimately untenable – argument, Peter Heslin has proposed that these paintings were programmatically arranged, and that they are reflected in two other sources: the poet Vergil's description of a cycle of pictures seen by Aeneas in the Temple of Juno at Carthage (Verg. *Aen.* 1.453–189) and the portico surrounding the Temple of Apollo in Pompeii (VII.7.32).²⁷ If allusions to such a public painting cycle do appear Vergil's *Aeneid*, they might very well highlight the cycle's political orientation, though the scene at the temple of Juno plays a number of other significant roles within the poem.²⁸ Augustus styled himself as both descendant and surpasser of Aeneas, founder of the city of Rome, and through his family the history of Troy was intimately linked to the history of Rome.

The frescoes in the Pompeian portico have been lost to time, but earlier graphic representations help recreate the overall scheme of a painted portico punctuated by fictive panel paintings (Figure 3.4), as well as some of the specific scenes, such as a goddess urging on a Greek hero (Figure 3.5), or the hero Achilles dragging the body of the Trojan prince Hector behind his chariot. If Heslin's hypothesis is correct, the replication of imagery from Rome in one of the prime public spaces of a colony like Pompeii would attest to the broad popularity and importance of politically oriented mythological paintings.²⁹ Other reflections of imperial imagery

²⁶ Viscogliosi in *LTUR* IV, 146–148, s.v. *Porticus Philippi*; cf. Plin. *HN* 35.66; Ovid *Fast.* 6.801–802; Suet. *Aug.* 29.5.

²⁷ Heslin 2015; cf. *PPM* 7.286–304.

²⁸ See e.g. Lowenstam 1993; Laird 1996: 87–94; Putnam 1998: 23–55; Squire 2014: 387–395.

²⁹ For persuasive arguments against Heslin's hypothesis, which involves substantial reconstructions based on often-slim evidence, see especially Squire 2016. I might also note here that Heslin 2015: 173–178 connects the apparently Fourth Style paintings found at the Temple of Apollo in Pompeii to the Augustan era by suggesting that the central mythological scenes were cut out of original Second Style paintings and re-inserted into the new decorative scheme. While such practices did occur, as Chapter 1 discussed, the kind of square-format mythological paintings with simple linear borders that seem to have appeared in the Temple of Apollo are common in the mid-first century CE but are not typically found in Second Style painting, and I am skeptical that they could derive from a first-century BCE context.



Figure 3.4 Temple of Apollo, Pompeii (VII.7.32), mid-first century CE. After Mazois 1838: pl. 19.

are evident in the area, sometimes in earnest, as in the paintings in front of a fullery in Pompeii (IX.13.5) which display a scene of Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius fleeing Troy and one of Romulus with the *spolia opima*, both key images from the statues erected in the Forum of Augustus in Rome, and sometimes ironically, such as the version of the Aeneas group which depicts the figures as cynocephalic and with exaggerated phalluses.³⁰

Even allusively political or ideological messages can be difficult to discern in the decorative programs of the houses on the Palatine, however. Scholars have attempted to identify political valences in depictions of rustic shrines in the centers of the walls in the Room of the Masks as visions of an uncorrupted age of simplicity evoked by the Augustan cultural program.³¹ The apparent harmony of human, divine, and natural that these landscapes show, in these interpretations, would echo the golden age (*aurea aetas*) of peace and plenty that Augustus' reign was meant to have renewed. But there are methodological and historical objections to such interpretations. They would, first, seem to run counter to the fundamentally ambiguous nature of paintings like these, exploiting a built-in indeterminacy or polysemy in the images to strip them of broad signification and aim them at a specific historical referent. The manifold meanings derivable from the atmospheric representation of a rustic shrine without human figure or narrative thrust are reduced to one single meaning, and the instability of the artwork is resolved into a stable proclamation of

³⁰ For the former see *PPM* 10.257–260; Spinazzola 1953: 147–155; Zanker 1988: 201–203; Stročka 2006: 281–283. For the latter, see e.g. Maiuri 1950; Zanker 1988: 209; Clarke 2003: 155–156. For the appearance of Aeneas on the *Tabulae Iliacae* and at the House of the Cryptoporticus in Pompeii see Squire 2011: 148–158; 2015e.

³¹ E.g. Silberberg-Peirce 1980; Iacopi 2008; Wamberg 2009: 465–470; cf. Strazzulla 1990: 22–29.

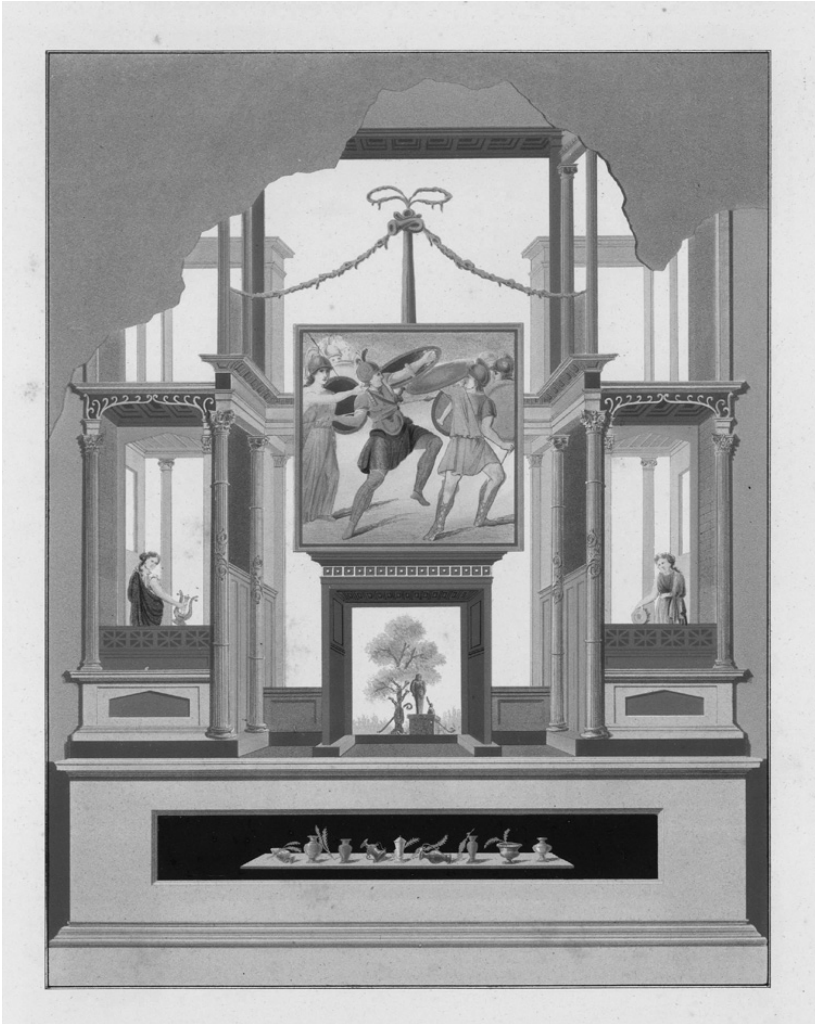


Figure 3.5 Painting from the portico of the Temple of Apollo, Pompeii (VII.7.32), mid-first century CE. Lithograph after Raoul-Rochette 1844–1853: pl. 8.

ideology.³² The historical and political specificity of such interpretations, moreover, is potentially circular; it both hinges on the identification of the patrons of these paintings as members of the imperial family and may be employed as evidence to reinforce such identifications. The debates over the chronology of the structure, however, may ultimately dissociate its

³² The potentially reductive nature of the political interpretation of mythological imagery is an issue for public monuments as well. For discussion of the multi-valent, open-ended nature of much Augustan imagery see e.g. Galinsky 1996: 192–197; for discussion of the differences between the kinds of messages encoded in public and private monuments see Hallett 2015.

decoration from the narrow ideological goals of Augustus and his immediate circle.

The painted decoration of two other, closely related late Republican houses on the Palatine illustrates the problems facing such specific political interpretations equally acutely. Located just to the northeast of the House of Augustus are the remains of a structure known as the House of Livia.³³ It may have formed a part of a larger network of houses belonging to the imperial family, but its date, too, is open to debate.³⁴ Five surviving rooms of the structure are decorated in late Second Style frescoes.³⁵ The largest of these, the so-called *tablinum*, is discussed in [Chapters 4 and 5](#). In a smaller side room, *triclinium* 4, however, we find a further simplification of the stage-front aedicular scheme punctuated by fictive paintings ([Figure 3.6](#)). On the right wall the viewer is presented with a low articulated dado; a shallow green stage supporting columns and colonnettes; a cross wall of large red orthostats, cornice, and frieze; a recessed upper zone; and a central *aedicula* within which is a large, vertically oriented imitation of an inset panel. The remains of a shuttered panel painting are visible to the left of the *aedicula* resting above the cornice. The central embedded panel, like those of the Room of the Masks, shows a rustic shrine dominated by an aniconic marker. In the foreground, a group of ducks floats on water flowing out from under a bridge.³⁶ Behind the bridge is a sanctuary marked by a tall, bulbous column decorated with the heads of an ox, a deer, and a goat, and on top of the column is a platform punctuated with hooks. Behind the column the wall of a *schola* curves around a spreading pine tree.

Political interpretations of the central panel have centered on the identification of the shrine. If the animal skulls are to be understood as trophies

³³ The structure was first partially unearthed during excavations carried out under the direction of the Farnese family in 1722–1724, and then fully brought to light in 1869 by Pietro Rosa. For an overview of the topography of the site see especially Irene Iacopi in *LTUR* II, 130–132, s.v. *Domus: Livia*. Cf. Rizzo [1936a](#): 1–7. It was identified as the house of Livia thanks to the discovery of a lead pipe inscribed IULIAE AUG[USTAE], the name by which Livia was known after Augustus' death, *CIL* 15.7264. The structure may have been partially damaged and rebuilt following a fire in 3 BCE. Coarelli [2007](#): 140; cf. [2012](#): 380–395 with revisions to his earlier conclusions. The fire is mentioned in Suetonius *Div. Aug.* 57.2, Cassius Dio 55.12.4–5, and Pliny *HN* 35.83, all of whom note that it affected the residence of Augustus.

³⁴ Tomei [2000](#): esp. 17–21; cf. Donderer [1995](#): esp. 625–630.

³⁵ Rizzo's monograph remains the only complete treatment of the paintings in the house. Rizzo [1936b](#). See also, among others, Rodenwaldt [1909](#): 10–12, 36–38, 228–232; Cagianò de Azevedo [1949](#); Peters [1963](#): 35–47; Leach [1982](#): 159–164; Ehrhardt [1987](#): 15–16; Moormann [1988](#): 232–233; Scheibler [1994](#): 65–67; Galinsky [1996](#): 179–196; Leach [2004](#): 134–135; Gury [2010](#).

³⁶ Rizzo [1936b](#): 51–58.

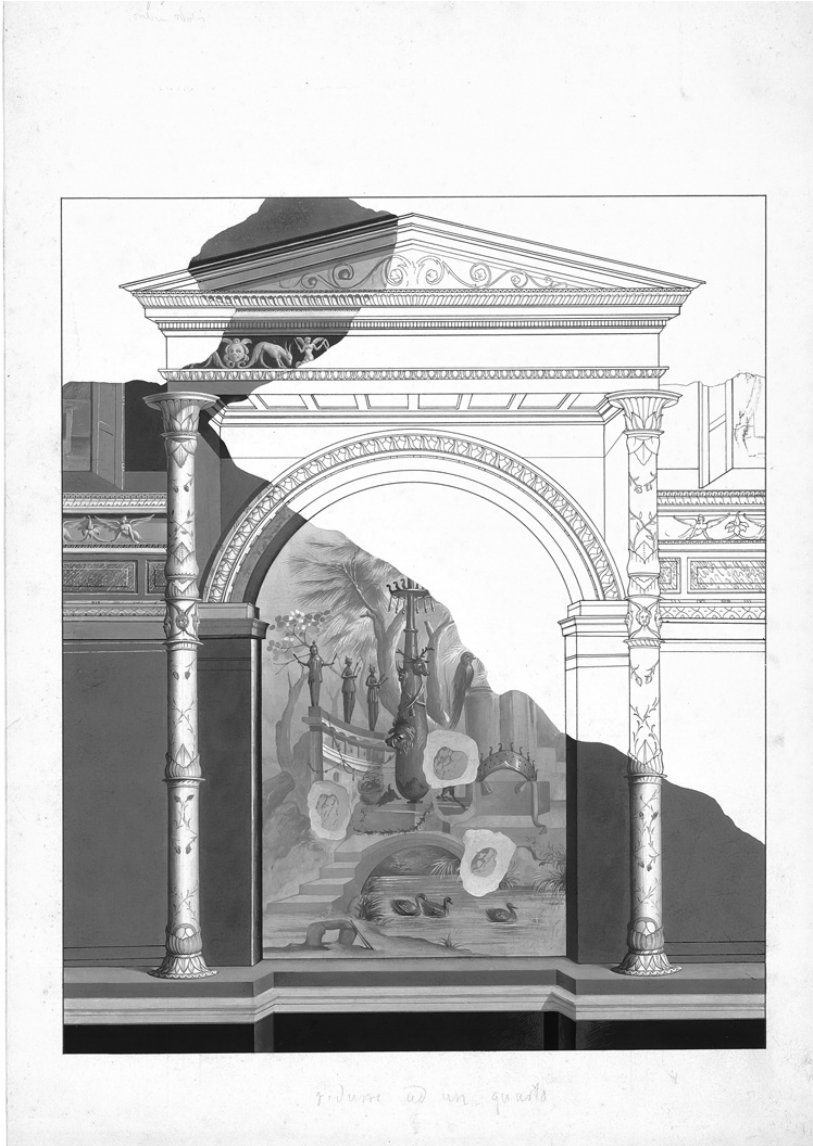


Figure 3.6 Room 4, House of Livia, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE.

of the hunt, for example, this may be a shrine to Diana,³⁷ and the three female statues on the *schola* wall, moreover, may be the markers of Hecate, assimilated to the goddess of the hunt.³⁸ The interpretation is further

³⁷ Rizzo 1936b: 57–58; cf. Simon 1986: 174, 188–189; Reeder 1989: 91–104; Fehrentz 1991; Sauron 1994: 577–586.

³⁸ Simon 1986: 189; Reeder 1989: 98–99; Sauron 2009: 138–143.

extended by associating the character of Diana with that of Livia herself, an apposite parallel to Augustus' close connection with Apollo.³⁹ This kind of reading relies on positing direct points of connection between the painting and biographical details of a historical figure, but it is not certain that Livia was the inhabitant of the complex when it was painted.

Regardless of the deity the sanctuary honors, moreover, the allusive and ambiguous qualities of the painting function on more fundamental levels, in no small part through the shrine's aniconism. One path of interpretation might be to read the aniconic marker as another reference to the religious practices of a putative purer, simpler past. According to Augustine (*De Civ. Dei* 4.31), Varro claimed that Numa Pompilius had instituted the practice of worshipping the gods without any images, and that the practice had endured for 170 years.⁴⁰ As Milette Gaifman's study of aniconism in the Greek world has shown that, although the practices of aniconic and iconic worship coexisted throughout Greek antiquity, the discourse surrounding the aniconic representation of the gods from Herodotus to Pausanias and beyond often attributed it to the early stages of human civilization.⁴¹ But, as Gaifman also emphasizes, aniconic worship could equally be seen as characteristic of the religious practices of peoples on the fringes of civilization, who do not necessarily supply an obvious model for Augustan ideology. To this point, we should recall that the House of Livia was built just a short distance from the most famous aniconic monument in the city – the black stone which served as the focus of the cult of Cybele, in the temple of the Magna Mater, a goddess who occupied a dual position at both the center and the margins of the Roman state.⁴² Cybele's cult had been officially imported to the Palatine Hill from Asia Minor at the end of the third century BCE during the Second Punic war, and the goddess, by virtue of being identified as a Trojan deity, offered an important connection to the Julian family's own Trojan origins.⁴³ Yet her priests, the *galli*, were marginal, norm-breaking figures in Roman society, and citizens may have been forbidden from joining the priesthood.⁴⁴

³⁹ See especially Sauron 2009, 142; cf. Fehrentz 1991: 85, 88–89. For Augustus' association with Apollo see e.g. Miller 2009; cf. Zanker 1988: 85–89.

⁴⁰ Sauron 2009, 139; cf. Plut. *Numa* 8; Tert. *Apol.* 25.12–13. ⁴¹ Gaifman 2012: esp. 305–312.

⁴² For which see e.g. Pensabene in *LTUR* III, 206–208, s.v. *Magna Mater, Aedes*; Gaifman 2012: 305.

⁴³ For the importation of the cult: Liv. 29.10.4–11.8; 29.14.5–9; Varro *Ling.* 6.15; Ovid. *Fast.* 4.180–372. For discussion see e.g. Borgeaud 2004: 57–71; Orlin 2010: 77–85.

⁴⁴ See especially Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.19; cf. Lucr. 2.610–628; Catull. 63; Ov. *Fast.* 4.193–244. Cf. e.g. Beard 1994; Orlin 2010: 100–104.

The scenes in the House of Livia, accordingly, may have variously evoked how the gods had been worshipped before the dawn of civilization, how they were then honored in distant lands on the borders of civilization, or how they were worshipped just a few meters away. Whether archaizing, othering, or familiar, however, it is worth emphasizing that the practice of aniconism traffics in both specificity and vagueness. The aniconic marker would seem to point unerringly toward a singular deity in a singular place; unlike the figural image it tends to lack a generalizable iconography.⁴⁵ But for that very reason its recognizability as an image of, or monument to, a particular deity would also seem to depend on social context and ritual practice, only traces of which are evident in the painting in question.⁴⁶ To put it another way, the content of an aniconic representation is dramatically underdetermined by its form, but that must have been a part of the motif's appeal. This is not to discount the complex iconographic decoding that modern scholars have engaged in – ancient viewers may well have done the same – but simply to assert that ambiguity and thus resistance to ideological specificity are built into the structure of the painting.

Similar problems beset another common object of political interpretations of these paintings: the representation of Egyptiana. In the very same painting in the House of Livia, it has also been proposed that the hooks of the diadem are in fact *uraei*, that is, stylized cobra heads taken from pharaonic Egyptian iconography, and that the shrine is that of Isis and Osiris.⁴⁷ Alternately, the bulbous column may be a marker of Osiris, and the water flowing under the bridge the source of the Nile.⁴⁸ Elsewhere on the Palatine the upper *cubiculum* of the House of Augustus features so many Egyptian motifs – including lotuses, *uraei*, and ceremonial vessels called *situlae* – that the excavator of the structure proposed that it may have been executed by a workshop from Alexandria.⁴⁹ A sufficient number of Egyptian motifs abound in the third late Republican structure from the Palatine, the so-called Aula Isiaca, that when it was first published in the early twentieth century it was identified as a cultic space.⁵⁰ This now seems

⁴⁵ Although for the dissemination of the image of the aniconic marker of Aphrodite of Paphos on coinage see Gaifman 2012: 170–180.

⁴⁶ See e.g. Gordon 1979: 11–17. ⁴⁷ Picard 1955; Picard-Schmitter 1971.

⁴⁸ Gury 2010, with extensive bibliography. ⁴⁹ Carettoni 1983b: 90–91.

⁵⁰ For the topography of the site see especially Papi in *LTUR* IV, 22–28, s.v. *Palatium* (età repubblicana–64 d.c.). Found and re-buried in the eighteenth century and then excavated again in 1912 by Giacomo Boni, the Aula Isiaca derives its name from the frequent appearance of Isiac motifs in its decorations. For the paintings see especially Rizzo 1936b; Schefold 1952: 1096–1102; Vlad Borelli 1967; Bastet and De Vos 1979: 22–23; De Vos 1980: 60; Moormann 1988: 231; Iacopi 1997; Mielsch 2001: 56–58; Grüner 2004: 116–117; Kleiner 2005: 170–172. The dating of the monument has been controversial. Proposed dates have ranged between ca.30

untenable, but we may note cobras, lotus flowers, ritual vessels, and perhaps even the lighthouse of Alexandria, shown in a scene of Helen and Paris disembarking in Egypt, on the remains of the shorter wall.⁵¹

According to the conventional dating of the Palatine paintings, such instantiations of Egyptiana should post-date the battle of Actium in 31 BCE and the subsequent incorporation of Egypt into Rome as an imperial province. The initial impression of peace and abundance, of a fertile and unthreatening natural world in sync with the mystery and antiquity of Egyptian culture, would overlay the political reality that these were in fact images of empire, the iconography of a subject province.⁵² The recently proposed revisions to the chronology of the House of Augustus, and by extension to the other Palatine structures, however, put that standard interpretation under threat. But the dissociation from the imperial family does not strip the motifs of meaning, either.⁵³ Egypt was present in Rome long before it became a Roman province.⁵⁴

Cultural and political ties had existed between Rome and Egypt since at least the early third century BCE.⁵⁵ When Ptolemy VI came to Rome in 164, he stayed with an Alexandrian map-painter named Demetrios.⁵⁶ The relationship intensified towards the end of the Republic. The mosaic from Palestrina depicting in topographic fashion the course of the Nile from desert to delta, likely produced sometime in the late second or early

BCE and the reign of Caligula, 37–41 CE, though this latter suggestion has since been abandoned. The most recent chronology for those structures would accordingly place the Aula Isiaca perhaps even as early as the 40s BCE. Irene Iacopi has proposed that the Aula Isiaca was decorated just after both the other Palatine complexes. Iacopi 1997: 5; cf. Beyen 1948: 12; Bastet and De Vos 1979: 22–23; Ling 1999. Like the House of Livia, it has been suggested that the Aula Isiaca may also have formed a part of a series of neighboring and interconnected houses that could have functioned like a palace during the Principate. See esp. Tomei 2000.

⁵¹ See e.g. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 11.40–41 for the tradition, which may have stretched back to Stesichorus, that Helen never went to Troy but was taken to Egypt by Paris. Rizzo 1936: 20–22, 37; Iacopi 1997: 21, 39. For other versions in which Helen travels to Egypt see e.g. *Hdt.* 2. 112–120; Eur. *Hel.*; cf. Allan 2008: 18–28. A certain prolepsis would be involved here, of course, as in the time of the Trojan War neither Alexandria nor its lighthouse yet existed.

⁵² Note that Fragaki 2008 has argued that Egyptian elements in Roman landscape painting are visions of utopia rather than references to current political realities.

⁵³ Cf. Bragantini 2014: 321.

⁵⁴ Note, moreover, that Jaś Elsner 2006 has argued that Egyptianizing art should in fact be understood as a branch of Roman classicism, a label usually reserved for the Roman adoption of earlier Greek forms. Conversely, on the possible political resonances of the depiction of both Greek and Egyptian elements in the murals of the Villa della Farnesina, likely produced in the 20s BCE, see Marvin 2008: 202–205. For the related phenomenon of the Athenian representation of Persian motifs see e.g. Miller 1997; 2006/2007.

⁵⁵ E.g. Lampela 1998; Coarelli 2008.

⁵⁶ Diod. Sic. 31.18.2; Val Max. 5.1.1; *DNO* nos. 3566–3567; Meyboom 1995b: 186–190; Holliday 2002: 104–112; Coarelli 2008: 43.



Figure 3.7 Palestrina Nile Mosaic, late second to early first century BCE.

first century BCE, attests to a deep knowledge of Egyptian geography, customs, and artistic motifs on the Italian peninsula (Figure 3.7).⁵⁷ And Judith McKenzie has argued that Alexandrian architecture and painting exerted a strong, undervalued influence on Roman painting throughout the first century BCE.⁵⁸ But references to Isis may not even depend on direct contact with Egypt. The cult of Isis was active in Italy by the first half of the first century BCE, where it may have arrived by way of Delos.⁵⁹ Towards the end of the Republic, Cleopatra's involvement with Julius Caesar and her visit to Rome in 46 BCE, in particular, captured the Roman imagination.⁶⁰

For all that Egyptian motifs appear throughout the mural, the compositional scheme of the long wall of the *Aula Isiaca*, one of the largest painted surfaces to have been recovered from the ancient world, is at least equally

⁵⁷ Meyboom 1995b; Coarelli 1996a; Ferrari 1999; 2013; Walker 2003; Zevi and Bove 2008; Hinterhöller-Klein 2015: 83–100. More generally on the importance of Egypt in Roman art see e.g. Roullet 1972; De Vos 1980; Versluys 2002; Ashton 2004; Söldner 2004; Fragaki 2008; Swetnam-Burland 2015; Barrett 2017.

⁵⁸ McKenzie 1990: 85–104; 2007: 96–112.

⁵⁹ Malaise 1972; Takács 1995. For Egyptianizing figurines from Delos see e.g. Barrett 2011.

⁶⁰ Kleiner 2005; cf. Walker and Higgs 2001; Lo Sardo 2008.

noteworthy for its dedication to the representation of artworks.⁶¹ Although the paintings have now heavily deteriorated, an eighteenth-century watercolor of the long wall indicates that the painting was recognizably modeled on a stage-front scheme, but had been expanded to include portico-like wings (Plate 6). We find, once again, a low dado supporting a narrow stage; a tall backing wall articulated into two distinct registers; and a blank area above the cross wall, enlivened at its outermost wings by architectural ornament. Finally, above that blank space, supported by short columns rising from the top of the backing wall and by the two tall piers at the furthest edges of the wall, are a soffit with one row of coffers and a cornice. Herms and other forms of architectural sculpture, vessels, and freestanding statues are shown across the top of the backing wall. In the center of the composition a large, arcuated central panel is framed by the straight lintel of an *aedicula*. Further scenes with human figures and architectural and natural elements decorate the cross walls to the left and right of the *aedicula*. The figural scenes on the backing wall were perhaps meant to represent frieze-panels, as in the Delian inventories, or they may have recalled the paintings in the *Stoa Poikile* in Athens, executed on wooden panels and affixed to the wall running along the length of the portico.⁶² The subjects of these represented paintings are in large part no longer discernible, although they seem to have been mythological in nature.⁶³ Rizzo identified the scene decorating the cross wall to the right of the central *aedicula* simply as an unknown marvel or portent; Schefold proposed that it may have been the birth of Helen from an egg.⁶⁴ If Schefold is correct, and if the adjoining short wall really did depict Paris and Helen at Alexandria, it may have been the events surrounding the epic cycle, as much as any reference to Egypt, which united the murals. Regardless of their subject matter, the defining feature of the murals is the vast area of space they give over to the representation of representation and the concordant primacy of figural painting. The depiction of such a grand architectural conceit, punctuated by the painting of painting, would seem to exceed any iconographical particularity.

⁶¹ In this vein, Vout 2003 has pointed out that the proportion of Egyptian to Hellenizing motifs in the Aula Isiaca has often been greatly over-stated, and that the paintings may have seemed significantly less exotic or foreign to a Roman audience than they have to modern scholars.

⁶² Plin. *HN* 35.58; Paus. 1.15; Synesios *Ep.* 54; 136.

⁶³ Iacopi 1997: 6–8, on the basis of the earlier drawings and prints of the wall, hypothesizes that the central scene displayed Isiac motifs.

⁶⁴ Rizzo 1936: 12–14 on the unknown marvel; Schefold 1953; cf. Iacopi 1997: 9 for the birth of Helen.

The Discourse of Art in Rome

I suggest that we need not read overtly political or imperial messages in the iconography of the decorative programs of the first-century structures on the Palatine. Yet insofar as they formed a part of the houses of Roman aristocrats, and insofar as they materially presented an aspect of their inhabitants' public personas, those decorative programs could function as political messages. At the interpretive level prior to parsing the minutiae of iconography, moreover, there is a more fundamental question at play. Why should there have been paintings of paintings in these houses at all, particularly at such a relatively early stage of the development of that tradition? A significant part of the motivation for the phenomenon lies in the deeply complex layering of fictions, games of mediation, and articulations of history with which this book is concerned. But these more self-evidently aesthetic issues cannot be extricated from the ethical value of art in the Roman world, and the painting of painting may speak as much to social as aesthetic interest. One response to the phenomenon would be to claim that the fictive panel painting provides a cheaper alternative to the acquisition of real Greek painting.⁶⁵ I argue below that the question of cost may in fact be important. But in the decoration of structures on the Palatine Hill this would not seem to be a substitution made out of simple economic necessity: if Augustus really had been the owner of one of these structures, he was also credited with the most expensive purchase of art recorded in antiquity.⁶⁶ Yet even if Augustus himself did not inhabit the complex, its location all but guarantees the social importance of its owner. This is all to say: the painting of painting cannot be explained as a mere imitation of what the patron could not afford. There is more at stake. This is the point where the significance of the discourse of public and private arts becomes clearest.⁶⁷

In the surviving sources, the importance of the distinction between public dedications and private consumption, and the concomitant moralization of art, stretches back at least to the mid-Republic.⁶⁸ Polybius, for example, takes care to note that in Marcellus' sack of the city of Syracuse at

⁶⁵ See e.g. Schefold 1952: 32–34; Eristov 1987: 110–112; Wyler 2006: 217; Rouveret 2007; Dubois-Pelerin 2008: 133; Wallace-Hadrill 2009: 34; Ghedini and Salvo 2015: 111; on the economics of Roman art cf. Harris 2015; on the organization and economics of mural painters' workshops at Pompeii especially Esposito 2009: 15–47; 2011.

⁶⁶ That of the *Aphrodite Anadyomene* by Apelles. Plin. *HN* 36.91; Strabo *Geog.* 14.2.19.

⁶⁷ Cf. e.g. Stewart 2003: 223–260.

⁶⁸ On the political significance of public space in Republican Rome see Russell 2015.

the end of the third century BCE, artworks that had originally appeared in private contexts were permitted to be taken into private Roman collections (9.10.13). But those that originally had been in public hands were subsequently rededicated in public spaces. In the mid-Republic, this distinction between public and private may have had an inherently religious undertone. Many Greek statues and paintings depicted the gods and were erected in religious sanctuaries, and to take them from those contexts could be construed as an act of impiety.

Cato the Censor, whose name would later come to function as a byword for traditional Roman morality, was deeply concerned with the religious significance of Greek art. From one point of view, statues of Greek gods may have seemed a threat to Roman religious traditions. Livy recounts a speech in which Cato discusses the works brought from Syracuse (34.4.4–5):

They are dangerous, believe me, those statues which have been brought to this city from Syracuse. I hear altogether too many people praising and wondering at the ornaments of Corinth and Athens and laughing at the earthen antefixes of our Roman gods. I prefer these gods, who are propitious and I hope will be so in the future, if we allow them to remain in their seats.⁶⁹

In part, the worry over religious propriety may be connected to aesthetic difference. The gods of Rome, Cato asserted, had been propitious when they were represented with humble terracotta figures. Those of Greece, whose statues were worthy of wonder and praise precisely because of their beauty and fine craftsmanship, represented a threat to that longstanding and evidently functional relationship. In Livy's account, Cato questions why the Romans should risk divine wrath by fawning over these Greek imports, no matter how beautifully crafted.⁷⁰ The implication, by extension, was that to give too much heed to the subtleties of Greek art, to too eagerly embrace Greek ways, was to risk losing the customs and attitudes that had allowed Rome to conquer its neighbors in the first place.

⁶⁹ *Infesta, mihi credite, signa ab Syracusis illata sunt huic urbi. Iam nimis multos audio Corinthi et Athenarum ornamenta laudantes mirantesque et antefixa fictilia deorum Romanorum ridentes. Ego hos malo propitios deos et ita spero futuros, si in suis manere sedibus patiemur.* Text from and translation adapted from the Loeb edition of Yardley 2017: 434–435. See for discussion Briscoe 1981: 50. The pairing of humble terracotta cult images with the proper functioning of Roman religion and society became a common trope. Cato's sentiment was later closely echoed by Seneca (*Ep.* 31.11).

⁷⁰ Erich Gruen has argued that this speech was a fiction composed by Livy, and that it represents not a position genuinely held by Cato but rather one projected on to him by the Augustan historian. Gruen 1992: 112; but contra see Pape 1975: 73–74; McDonnell 2006; cf. Astin 1978. For Cato's discussion of domestic architecture see Nichols 2010: 43–47; 2017: 90–98.

Yet elsewhere Cato also expressed concern about the fate of the statues themselves, which were in some sense coterminous with the deities they represented. In another speech, *Uti praeda in publicum referatur*, or “That the spoils of war should be given back to the public,” he revealed his dissatisfaction that religious items taken as spoils of war, such as statues of divinities, had been collected so casually in private homes: “I am astounded at their audacity and at how they fail to maintain the proper bounds of religious feeling, those who place the statues of gods – the manifestations of their countenances – in their own homes as though they were furniture.”⁷¹ Here it is the indignity that the desacralization of religious sculpture inflicts on the gods themselves which supplies the target of Cato’s ire, rather than the aesthetic competition these statues might offer to traditional Roman religious sculpture.

To take these notices seriously, already in the mid-Republic it was difficult to extricate all the issues at play: Greek and Roman, public and private, religious and secular, and ethical and aesthetic are all bound up with one another. By the time of the late Republic and early Empire, a discourse began to crystallize in which the consumption of Greek art was ethically sanctioned in some circumstances and censured in others. The threat it posed was due not so much to religious or aesthetic reasons, nor, as Plutarch would say, because it distracted the Roman populace from important political and military tasks (*Marc.* 21). It was dangerous, rather, for what it encouraged – the expenditure of energy and money toward amassing private art collections, which, by virtue of their belonging to individuals and being closed off from the general populace, were inherently anti-civic. In short, the private collection of art, especially Greek art, came to be viewed as an expression of luxury, which itself, in the context of Roman public life, could be read as a symptom of moral decline.

An earlier section of the same speech of 195 BCE attributed by Livy to Cato articulated, at least for first-century Romans, the prototypical statement of such conservatism, naming the two vices of greed and luxury as the enemies of every great empire (*Liv.* 34.4.1). The concept of luxury remained a *topos* of moral decline throughout the Roman period, and luxurious habits were often frequently associated with non-Roman

⁷¹ *Miror audere atque religione non tenere, statuas deorum, exempla earum facierum, signa domi pro suppellectile statuere.* ORF 98, *apud* Prisc. *Inst.* 2.367K. Cato also authored a now-lost speech on statues and paintings, entitled *De signis et tabulis* (perhaps ORF 94, *apud* Festus *Glos. Lat.* 286M), though we are not certain what its contents were.

cultures.⁷² It is not clear that Cato explicitly connected the moral decline of luxury to the collection of Greek art, but by the late Republic, the idea of luxury and the private consumption of Greek art would become inextricably intertwined.⁷³ But the converse position seems to have held weight as well: the dedication of works of art in public spaces could serve a valuable role in Roman civic life.

This division had its roots in Hellenistic and Republican habits of public dedications. Vitruvius, for instance, points to public displays in Pergamon, especially the erection of a public library, as a tangible benefit to the citizen body (*De arch.* 7.praef.4). It was also politically motivated; Cicero states as a truism that the Roman people loved public munificence but abhorred private luxury (*Mur.* 76). The bifurcated view of the role of art is especially evident in Cicero's prosecution of Gaius Verres for the improper governing of the province of Sicily.⁷⁴ The fourth book of Cicero's second oration against Verres constitutes the most sustained commentary we have today on the status of Greek art in Republican Rome. Verres' crimes, for which he was convicted, were many, but his insatiable desire for artworks had been particularly galling to the Sicilians; Cicero claims that Verres left untouched no silver vase, no gem, no pearl, no object of gold or of ivory, no bronze, marble, nor ivory statue, no picture either painted on a tablet or woven in tapestry that he had felt any desire at all to possess (*Verr.* 2.4.1).

As Margaret Miles has argued, in Cicero's Verrine orations we see a clear formulation of a principle of Roman art collecting: public art collections provide some benefit to the state and are therefore commendable, but private art collections pose a danger as loci of luxury, greed, and excess.⁷⁵ Verres not only committed the crimes of theft and extortion in his acquisition of art, he violated basic principles of decency by keeping such works to himself and displaying them only in his own home. Verres' acquisition of art, according to Cicero, differed from that of the great Republican generals such as Marcellus, the Scipios, and Mummius in two primary ways (*Verr.* 2.1.55). They had acquired artworks as legitimate spoils of war, the *spolia* due to them as conquerors of foreign territories, whereas Verres had

⁷² Edwards 1993; cf. 1996: esp. 102–105; Sekora 1977: 29–39; Weeber 2006; Morgan 2007; Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 315–355; Fontanella 2009. *Contra* see Gruen 1992: esp. 103–113. In later Roman writers, the discourse was particularly associated with Hellenism. See e.g. Liv. 38.43.5; 39.6.6–7; Pliny *HN* 34.34; 34.148; 35.66.

⁷³ On the relation of painting to luxury see e.g. Wyler 2006: 217; Squire 2009: 408–416; Nichols 2017: 144–146; 163–179.

⁷⁴ For Cicero's Verrine orations see e.g. Zimmer 1994; Riggsby 1999: 120–150; Miles 2002; Weis 2003; Bounia 2004: 269–306; Frazel 2005; Miles 2008: esp. 105–217; Lazzeretti 2015.

⁷⁵ Miles 2008: 6; cf. Rouveret 2015: 111–113.

robbed from the inhabitants of a province for whose welfare he was responsible. Of comparable significance, however, was the manner of distribution of such *spolia*. The great Republican generals, according to Cicero, had proved their moral uprightness by dedicating the newly acquired works of art in public spaces, available for the benefit of the entire citizenry (*Verr.* 2.1.55): “These were men of high rank and eminent character, but their houses were empty of statues and pictures; while we still see the whole city, and the temples of the gods, and every part of Italy, adorned with the gifts and memorials that they brought us.”⁷⁶ So great was the desire for the public display of art, Cicero articulates, that honest, responsible men would borrow works of art for short periods of time in order to display them publicly, before returning them to their original locations (*Cic. Verr.* 2.4.6).⁷⁷

Political potentates in the second half of the first century BCE were not only censured for the privatization of art, they were praised for its public dedication.⁷⁸ Augustus, in particular, seems to have enthusiastically exploited this opportunity.⁷⁹ We hear that Augustus returned or substituted a number of famous artworks taken from polities in the Greek east by Antony, his primary rival in the civil wars following the death of Julius

⁷⁶ *Quorum domus, cum honore et virtute florerent, signis et tabulis pictis erant vacuae; at vero urbem totam templeque deorum omnesque Italiae partes illorum donis ac monumentis exornatas videmus.* Text and translation from the Loeb edition of Greenwood 1928: 178–179. Cf. especially *Cic. Rep.* 1.21; *Strabo, Geog.* 6.381; *Livy per.* 52.

⁷⁷ Decades later Cicero would castigate Anthony for removing the statues, paintings, and other *ornamenta* which Julius Caesar had left in his gardens to the people of Rome. See e.g. *Cic. Phil.* 2.109; 2.30. Cf. Hall 2002. For further evidence on the gardens left by Caesar to the Roman people see especially *Cic. Att.* 15.15.2; *Suet. Caes.* 84; *Appian BC* 2.143; *Cass. Dio* 44.35. Richard Neudecker has suggested that gardens such as Caesar’s were one of the primary arenas of private art display in the late Republic. Neudecker 1988: 5, 115; cf. e.g. Cima and La Rocca 1998; Hartswick 2004; Newby 2012; 2016: 80–136.

⁷⁸ Of note here is an anecdote in which Pliny relates that the inscription on the base of a statue of Hercules on the Rostra in the Roman Forum proclaimed that the statue, originally displayed in public, had at some point been taken into private ownership but was then restored to the public by Titus Septimius Sabinus when he was curule aedile (*HN* 34.93). Wiseman asserts that Sabinus was praetor in 28 BCE, and it seems likely that his aedileship would have taken place not long before, perhaps around the time of the battle of Actium. Wiseman 1971: 258; cf. Rawson 1985: 114. Although we are given no reasons behind the statue’s rededication in public, the presence of the inscription would seem to suggest that the distinction between public and private display was significant.

⁷⁹ It is also worth noting that publicly dedicated works appear to have become state property, with neither their dedicators nor honorees retaining control over them. A passage in the *Digest* (43.24.11.1) relays an opinion of Cassius that the state or municipality had the right to remove any statue it wished from public display, with or without the consent of the parties involved in its dedication. See Calabi Limentani 1958: 117; cf. *Dig.* 30.21.

Caesar (Aug. *RG* 24).⁸⁰ Strabo contrasts Augustus' behavior with Antony's collecting habits, focusing especially on the removal of statues from temples, which he views as an act of desecration. Augustus, in an act of reconsecration, later returned the statues (*Geog.* 13.1.30): "For Antony took away the finest dedications from the most famous temples, to gratify the Egyptian woman, but Augustus gave them back to the gods."⁸¹

The valorization of public art displays became especially prominent during the Principate. According to Pliny, Augustus' primary lieutenant Agrippa once gave a speech explicitly condemning the private collection of statues and paintings and praising their public dedication (*HN* 35.26):

But if the Dictator Caesar gave exceptional public influence to painted panels when he dedicated an Ajax and a Medea in front of his Temple of Venus Genetrix, after him was Marcus Agrippa, a man more suited to rustic behaviors than to extravagances. At all events there remains a speech of his, magnificent and worthy of the best of the citizens, concerning the necessity of making public all painted panels and statues, the realization of which would have been more satisfying than their being driven into the exile of villas.⁸²

Agrippa himself, Pliny then tells us, paid the exorbitant sum of 1.2 million sesterces for two small panel paintings from the city of Cyzicus in Asia Minor, which he then set into the marble walls of his public bath complex (*HN* 35.26). The names of the painters of these two *tabulae* are not recorded, but we are to understand that they are highly estimable Greek works, whose display enhanced the reputation and political standing of the dedicator and offered pleasure to the general populace.⁸³ In this respect the

⁸⁰ These included a statue of Apollo by Myron, which Antony had removed from Ephesus (Plin. *HN* 34.58), statues of Athena and Herakles, also by Myron, from Samos (Strabo *Geog.* 14.1.14), and a statue of Ajax taken from Rhoetum to Alexandria (Strabo *Geog.* 13.1.30). Strabo also relates, however, that Augustus took a third part of this statue group by Myron, which represented Zeus, and dedicated it in a purpose-built building on the Capitoline Hill in Rome. This, of course, still constitutes a public display, if not a rededication of the work in its original location. See also Cass. Dio 51.17 for further evidence on the treasure looted from Alexandria after Augustus' victory. As a further point of contrast we are told, for example, that Augustus carried out part of the will of Julius Caesar by paying out 300 sesterces a man to the Roman plebeian population, Aug. *RG* 15. In general, on the restitution of works of art in antiquity see Lapatin 2010.

⁸¹ τὰ γὰρ κάλλιστα ἀναθήματα ἐκ τῶν ἐπιφανεστάτων ἱερῶν ὁ μὲν ἦρε, τῇ Αἰγυπτίᾳ χαρίζομενος, ὁ δὲ θεοῖς ἀπέδωκε. Text and translation from the Loeb edition of Jones 1929: 60–61.

⁸² *Sed praecipuam auctoritatem publice tabulis fecit Caesar dictator Aiace et Media ante Veneris Genetricis aedem dicatis, post eum M. Agrippa, vir rusticitati propior quam deliciis. exstat certe eius oratio magnifica et maximo civium digna de tabulis omnibus signisque publicandis, quod fieri satius fuisset quam in villarum exilia pelli.* Text from and translation adapted from the Loeb edition of Rackham 2003: 278–279. Cf. Pape 1975: 76–80.

⁸³ That is, the artists of the paintings purchased by Agrippa from Cyzicus are unknown. See also Plin. *HN* 36.189. The paintings set up in front of the Temple of Venus Genetrix are attributed

passage mirrors Pliny's valorization of panels over murals, which ostensibly hinges on the fact that panels, by virtue of their portability, can more easily be displayed in public places and thus serve a civic purpose (*HN* 35.37). Here Pliny laments that Agrippa's request had not been carried out in the intervening decades, but in their monumental interventions into the urban fabric of the city of Rome, Augustus, Agrippa, and their circle appear to have publicly dedicated artworks on an unprecedented scale.

In doing so, Augustus was continuing the kind of Republican practice Cicero had contrasted to that of Verres. Literary sources indicate that works of art continuously counted among the dedications in Rome by victorious generals, in particular, from at least the third century BCE onwards. From Marcellus⁸⁴ and Fabius⁸⁵ to Lucius Mummius Achaicus, victor over Corinth in 146 BCE,⁸⁶ and Quintus Caecilius Metellus Macedonicus, who constructed the Porticus Metelli, according to Cicero among the foremost public art display spaces in the city (*Verr.* 2.4.126),⁸⁷ the construction of public buildings and the outfitting of those buildings with beautiful works of art was a key aspect of Roman political life.

As the Republic began to disintegrate, the symbolic and material scale of such dedications increased. The enormous theatrical complex built by

elsewhere by Pliny to Timomachus of Byzantium; he records that Caesar paid 80 talents for them. See *HN* 35.40. Ovid also seems to refer to their position in that complex in the *Tristia* 2.521–528, and notes, as an apology for the openly erotic subject matter of his own work, that the two tragic scenes of Medea contemplating the murder of her children and of the suicidal Ajax are set up next to the more erotic subject of Venus rising from the waves, presumably Apelles' *Aphrodite Anadyomene*. Cf. Pliny *HN* 35.91; *DNO* nos. 3537–3561.

⁸⁴ Who built the temple of Honos and Virtus at the Porta Capena. Cic. *Verr.* 2.4.121; Liv. 27.25. 7–9; 24.40.1–3; Aug. *RG* 11; cf. Pape 1975: 6–8, 166–167; Palombi in *LTUR* III, 31–33, s.v. *Honos et Virtus, Aedes*; McDonnell 2006.

⁸⁵ Who dedicated a statue of Herakles by Lysippus from Tarentum and an equestrian statue of himself on the Capitoline. Plut. *Fab.* 22.6; cf. Strab. *Geog.* 6.3.1; Plin. *HN* 34.40; Pape 1975: 8; *DNO* nos. 2173–2180.

⁸⁶ Cicero *Verr.* 2.1.55 notes that he had beautified the city of Rome with the spoils of Corinth. We are otherwise told that he was among the first to bring attention to the importance of Greek painted panels by dedicating the painting of Dionysus (Father Liber) by Aristides, whose value he had not originally understood and which he had demanded back from Attalus II, in the temple of Ceres on the Aventine. Plin. *HN* 35.24; 10.99; Graverini 2001; *DNO* nos. 2746–2752. For the confluence of Mummius' ignorance and the dedication of his spoils, see especially Dio Chrys. 37.42. Cf. Pape 1975: 154; Coarelli in *LTUR* I, 260–261, s.v. *Ceres, Liber, Liberaeque, Aedes; Aedes Cereris*. According to Strabo *Geog.* 8.8.6, the famous painting was destroyed by a fire in 31 BCE.

⁸⁷ The portico was especially famous thanks to the Granikos Monument, which Metellus had brought back from Greece. Vell. Pat. 1.11.3–4; Plin. *HN* 34.64; Arrian *Anab.* 1.16.4; cf. Plut. *Alex.* 16.15–16. Executed by Lysippus and composed of at least twenty-six independent bronze equestrian statues, including an equestrian portrait of Alexander the Great, the monument commemorated soldiers who had fallen in the battle against Darius at the Granikos. Pollitt 1986: 41–46; cf. Pape 1975: 160; *DNO* nos. 2198–2202.

Pompey the Great constitutes a case in point. This structure, built between 61 and 55 BCE, counted among the greatest of all such Republican public building projects.⁸⁸ The massive quadroportico set directly behind the stage building of Pompey's theater was as well known for its gardens and works of art as for its architectural splendor.⁸⁹ The portico was especially noteworthy for its Greek paintings. It included works by the Classical Athenian painter Polygnotos;⁹⁰ by Pausias, a contemporary of Apelles in the late fourth century BCE;⁹¹ by Nikias, another fourth-century painter;⁹² and by Antiphilos of Alexandria, a Hellenistic painter whose exact dates are not recorded.⁹³ The portico must have been decorated with many other works of art as well; though we cannot reconstruct a complete decorative program, from the surviving evidence it was evidently carefully curated,⁹⁴ and may even have been assembled with the help of an expert.⁹⁵

Perhaps the last great Republican public dedication of Greek artworks occurred at the *Atrium Libertatis*. The traditional seat of the censors, it was rebuilt by Asinius Pollio in 39 BCE with funds from his Illyrian campaigns, likely completing an act that Julius Caesar had planned to accompany his Forum and new Curia.⁹⁶ In addition to providing the city of Rome with its first public library, the *Atrium Libertatis* publicly displayed numerous works of highly esteemed Greek art. Pliny alone lists fifteen separate statues or statue groups on display in the compound, by artists as highly regarded as Praxiteles and Scopas.⁹⁷ He tells us that Pollio specifically wanted his collection to be seen; presumably this was because of the social and political capital that his beneficence and good taste would have accrued him (*HN* 36.33).

⁸⁸ See e.g. App. *Mith.* 7.116–117; Plin. *HN* 33.151; 37.12–14; Prop. *Eleg.* 2.32.11; Vit. *De arch.* 5.9.1. Cf. Carettoni 1960: frags. 39a–c, pl. 32; Rodríguez Almeida 1981: pl. 32; Pape 1975: 24–25, 189–190; Sauron 1987; 1994: 249–314; Coarelli 1996b; Kuttner 1999; Gros in *LTUR* IV, 148–149, s.v. *Porticus Pompei*.

⁸⁹ Martial mentions a double grove (2.14.10); Propertius asserts that the center of the structure was planted with two rows of plane trees (*El.* 2.32.13). Elsewhere the visitor encountered fountains and statues interspersed among the plantings (*El.* 2.32.14–16). Cf. Cat. *Carm.* 55; Prop. *El.* 4.8.75; Ov. *Ars. am.* 1.67; 3.387; Mart. 11.47.3. Kuttner 1999: 351.

⁹⁰ Plin. *HN* 35.58–59; *DNO* nos. 1464–1516, esp. 1494.

⁹¹ Plin. *HN* 35.126; *DNO* nos. 2701–2708, esp. 2703.

⁹² Plin. *HN* 35.132. Pliny himself is confused as to whether there was more than one Nikias (*HN* 35.133), but the later fourth century BCE seems most likely. *DNO* nos. 2805–2827.

⁹³ Plin. *HN* 35.114; 138. *DNO* nos. 3043–3051. ⁹⁴ See Kuttner 1999; cf. Coarelli 1996b.

⁹⁵ We know, from a letter written by Cicero to Atticus (*Cic. Att.* 4.9) conveying Pompey's thanks for Atticus' work putting together a display of sculpture that the latter had organized some statues for Pompey, though the location is not made explicit.

⁹⁶ *Cic. Att.* 4.17.7; Suet. *Aug.* 29.5; Isid. *Ety.* 6.5.2; Livy 43.16.13; 45.15.5; Ov. *Trist.* 3.1.69–72; Plin. *HN* 35.10; 36.23–25; 36.33–34. See: Pape 1975: 177–179. Cf. Coarelli in *LTUR* I, 133–135, s.v. *Atrium Libertatis*; Amici in *LTUR* V, 92–93, s.v. *Atrium Libertatis*.

⁹⁷ Plin. *HN* 36.23–25; 33–34; *DNO* nos. 1851–2031; 2286–2335.

During the Principate, the task of public building and the concomitant public dedication of artworks could be undertaken in previously unimaginable ways. According to Dio Cassius (49.43), when Agrippa was named aedile in 33 BCE, he undertook a thorough campaign of repair and reorganization of the city's structures at no cost to the public treasury.⁹⁸ But in the years before and subsequent to Agrippa's aedileship, the circle of the imperial family embarked on a building campaign in the city of Rome on a massive, unprecedented scale, and they were careful to outfit a large number of these structures with famous, captivating works of Greek art.⁹⁹ No fewer than fourteen major building projects were at least partially dedicated to housing known, named, famous Greek artworks. These included the Temple of Apollo Medicus, better known as the Temple of Apollo Sosianus;¹⁰⁰ the Temple of Concord;¹⁰¹ the Curia Iulia, begun by Julius Caesar in 44 but completed by Octavian in 29 BCE;¹⁰² the Forum Iulium, likewise completed and rededicated by Octavian in 44;¹⁰³ the Temple of the Divine Julius Caesar;¹⁰⁴ the Forum of Augustus and the Temple of Mars Ultor – the temple was vowed by Octavian before the battle of Philippi but the Forum was only dedicated in 2 BCE;¹⁰⁵ the Porticus Octaviae, which replaced the earlier Porticus Metelli and was completed probably before 23 BCE;¹⁰⁶ the Porticus Philippi, built in the late 30s BCE;¹⁰⁷ the Saepta Iulia and the Thermae Agrippae, built by Marcus Agrippa in the 20s BCE;¹⁰⁸ the Temple of Apollo Palatinus,

⁹⁸ Frontinus (*Aq.* 2.97–98) reports that in the year after his aedileship (32 BCE), Agrippa took up a permanent position as caretaker of his own works and public gifts in perpetuity.

⁹⁹ For the impact of Augustus' building programs on the city see, among others, Pollitt 1978; Zanker 1988: 79–264; Favro 1996; Haug 2001; Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 259–314; Rutledge 2012: 221–266; Bravi 2012; Newby 2016: 48–64.

¹⁰⁰ Pape 1975: 143–145; La Rocca 1985; 1988; Viscogliosi 1996; Viscogliosi in *LTUR* I, 49–54, s.v. *Apollo, aedes in Circo*.

¹⁰¹ See e.g. Gasparri 1979; Kellum 1990; Ferroni in *LTUR* I, 316–320, s.v. *Concordia, aedes*.

¹⁰² Pape 1975: 156–157; Morselli, Tortorici, and Alvaro 1989; Tortorici in *LTUR* I, 332–334, s.v. *Curia Iulia*.

¹⁰³ Pape 1975: 193–194; Amici 1991; Gros in *LTUR* II, 306–307, s.v. *Forum Iulium, Venus Genetrix, aedes*; Morselli in *LTUR* II, 299–306, s.v. *Forum Iulium*.

¹⁰⁴ Pape 1975: 169–171; Gros in *LTUR* III, 116–119, s.v. *Iulius, Divus, aedes*.

¹⁰⁵ Pape 1975: 163–164; Kockel in *LTUR* II, 289–295, s.v. *Forum Augustum*.

¹⁰⁶ Gros 1973; Pape 1975: 185–187; Viscogliosi in *LTUR* IV, 130–132, s.v. *Porticus Metelli*; 141–145, s.v. *Porticus Octaviae*.

¹⁰⁷ Pape 1975: 187–188; Richardson 1977; Viscogliosi in *LTUR* IV, 146–148, s.v. *Porticus Philippi*; Heslin 2015: 197–254.

¹⁰⁸ For the Saepta: Pape 1975: 191; Tortorici 1990: 21–26; Gatti in *LTUR* IV, 228–229, s.v. *Saepta Iulia*. For the Thermae Agrippae: Pape 1975: 192–193; Tortorici 1990: 47–52; Ghini in *LTUR* V, 40–42, s.v. *Thermae Agrippae*.

dedicated in 28 BCE;¹⁰⁹ and the new Regia, restored by Calvinus after a fire in 36 BCE.¹¹⁰

These structures were filled with artworks. Of all of the Greek sculpture and paintings recorded in Rome at any time by literary sources (a surprisingly small list, only 102 sculptures or statue groups and 48 paintings), nearly half were housed in these Augustan building projects.¹¹¹ The corpus is severely limited, in that it comprises solely Greek artworks for which we have a title or other specific description. Many more paintings must have been on public view – we need only think of all the *spolia* contained in the triumphs of Marcellus from Syracuse and of Mummius from Corinth, of the Pergamene works transferred to Rome after the bequest of Attalus III, or all of the paintings in Sikyon, epicenter of Late Classical and Hellenistic painting (Plin. *HN* 35.75), which were reportedly transferred to Rome during Scaurus' consulship in 58 BCE (Plin. *HN* 35.127). Nevertheless, the works in this corpus are those for which the names have been preserved; they were, under some rubric, considered to be among the most remarkable on view in Rome.

It has been suggested that the public display of art served as a specific branch of Augustan social policy, designed to combat the kinds of luxurious private art consumption associated with Verres and other late Republican elites.¹¹² Certainly one hallmark of Augustan political rhetoric was the appeal to an older and ostensibly purer moral tradition. According to Suetonius, Augustus passed a number of moral and sumptuary laws, which sought to regulate the amount of money that could be spent on feasts as well as adultery, chastity, bribery, and fertility (*Aug.* 34; cf. *Gell. NA* 2.24). This was all cast in the rhetoric of a return to traditional customs. Suetonius also reports that he would read out speeches originally composed by famous Republican statesmen (*Aug.* 89), and Augustus himself claimed to have both followed the examples of the ancestors and to have set new examples for posterity (*Aug. RG* 8. 5).¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Pape 1975: 145–148; Gros in *LTUR* I, 54–57, s.v. *Apollo Palatinus*; Claridge in *LTUR* V, 225, s. v. *Apollo Palatinus*.

¹¹⁰ Scott in *LTUR* IV, 189–192, s.v. *Regia*.

¹¹¹ See for lists of Greek art in Rome Pollitt 1978; Gualandi 1982; Ridgway 1984: 109–112. Specifically for a list of Greek paintings in the city see Rouveret 1989: 488–496.

¹¹² Pollitt 1978: 165.

¹¹³ “By new laws carried under my authorship I brought back many examples of our ancestors that were already dying out from our century and I myself handed down examples of many things to be imitated by later generations” (*noui[s] m[e] auctore l]atis m[ulta e]xempla maiorum exolescentia iam ex nostro [saecu]lo red[uxi et ipse] multarum rer[um exe]mpla imitanda pos[teris tradidi]*). Text Cooley 2009: 66; translation adapted from Lowrie 2007: 105.

There is only scant evidence that either construction practices or the consumption of art were subject to anti-luxury sumptuary legislation or other means of official control.¹¹⁴ But the idea that the Augustan building program and its art displays played a part in this self-proclaimed project of moral renovation is suggested by Ovid's discussion of the Temple of Concord in the Portico of Livia. Built upon the massive estate of Vedius Pollio and willed to Augustus in 15 BCE, the structure was subsequently transformed into a public monument replete with works of art.¹¹⁵ Ovid describes the conversion of the site incisively, placing special emphasis on the moral reasoning behind Augustus' handling of the estate (Fast. 6.637–648):

You, also, Concord, Livia dedicated in a magnificent shrine, which she presented to her own dear husband. Know this however, age to come: where the portico of Livia now stands, there once were the roofs of an enormous home. The single house was like the fabric of a city, and it occupied a space larger than that occupied by the walls of many a town. It was leveled to the ground, not on a charge of treason, but because its luxury seemed harmful. Caesar held to cast down so great a work, and to destroy so much wealth, to which he himself was heir. Thus does the Censor conduct himself; thus are examples set, when the protector does himself what he warns others to do.¹¹⁶

By invoking the office of Censor, Ovid offers a moral gloss on Augustus' conversion of the inherited land, and implicitly compares him with the

¹¹⁴ Augustus evidently read out in the Senate a speech originally given by Rutilius Rufus in 105 BCE concerning buildings, *de modo aedificiorum* (Suet. *Aug.* 89), and the heights of buildings were regulated in an effort to reduce fire hazards (Strab. *Geog.* 5.3.7), but it does not appear that the construction of buildings was subject to sumptuary legislation. See Strong 1994: 187–199; Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 329–338.

¹¹⁵ Syme 1961. The portico is preserved on the Severan Marble plan. See: Carettoni 1960: 100–r, pl. 18; Rodríguez Almeida 1981: pls. 7–8. It was evidently not finished until 7 BCE, when it was dedicated by Tiberius on behalf of his mother. See Dio 55.8.1–2; 54.23.1–6; cf. Flory 1984; Zanker 1988: 137–143; Roller 2013: 126–130. Cf. Panella in *LTUR* IV, 127–129, s.v. *Porticus Liviae*. It seems to have held a number of important works of Greek art. Ovid notes, in the *Ars Amatoria* (1.71–72), that the Porticus Liviae was decorated with a number of old panel paintings, *priscis tabellis*, which may have been venerable Greek paintings. Additionally, at least some of the references to dedications of art in the *Aedes Concordia* in Pliny, may in fact refer to that Temple of Concord in the Porticus Liviae (Ov. *Fast.* 6.637), rather than to the Aedes Concordia Augustae on the slopes of the Capitoline Hill. Cf. Pape 1975: 155–156.

¹¹⁶ *Te quoque magnifica, Concordia, dedicat aede / Livia, quam caro praestitit ipsa viro. / disce tamen, veniens aetas: ubi Livia nunc est / porticus, immensae tecta fuere domus; / urbis opus domus una fuit, spatiumque tenebat, / quo brevius muris oppida multa tenent / haec aequata solo est, nullo sub crimine regni / sed quia luxuria visa nocere sua. / sustinuit tantas operum subvertere moles / totque suas heres perdere Caesar opes. / sic agitur censura et sic exempla parantur, / cum vindex, alios quod monet, ipse facit.* Text from and translation adapted from the Loeb edition of Frazer and Goold 1996: 366–369. Cf. Ovid *Ars Am.* 1.71–71; Strabo *Geog.* 5.3.8; Plin. *HN* 34.2.

most famous censor, Cato. The potential for irony here is palpable, as Ovid's relationship with Augustus was tempestuous. But whether the passage expresses genuine admiration for the imperial program or subverts the Augustan narrative, its importance lies, as Paul Zanker has argued, in the fact that the poet casts the construction of public buildings in explicitly moral terms.¹¹⁷ Under this reading, in a demonstration of his own social policies, the *princeps* foreswore personal gain in order to provide some benefit to the public. The situation was likely more complicated. Cassius Dio (54.23.5) reports that Pollio, a notoriously cruel and self-indulgent man, had requested that a beautiful public structure be erected with part of the estate, and perhaps Augustus had simply fulfilled the terms of a will. Or, perhaps, he had sought to dissociate himself from Pollio's reputation by changing the name and function of the space.¹¹⁸ But ironic or not, Ovid's discussion presses right to the heart of the complex intertwining of ethics and aesthetics, luxurious indulgence and abstemiousness, and public and private in Roman thought during the late first century BCE.

Painting the Roman House

Yet the distinction between public and private was not always so clear-cut.¹¹⁹ As Vitruvius articulates, the boundaries could especially blur in the aristocratic Roman house (*De arch.* 6.5.2):

But for nobles, who in holding honors and fulfilling the duties of the magistrate have to interact with the citizens, there should be constructed regal vestibules, high atria and wide courtyards, forests and extensive walks, all brought to completion in a manner befitting their power, and moreover libraries and picture galleries and basilicas set up in a manner not dissimilar to the magnificence of public works, because in the houses of these men very frequently both public counsels and private judgments and decisions are carried out.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Zanker 1988: 137–139.

¹¹⁸ For Pollio's notorious cruelty and luxury, which were tightly woven together in the public imagination, see Suet. *Aug.* 29.4; Dio 54.23; Plin. *HN* 9.77; Tac. *Ann.* 1.10.

¹¹⁹ Cf. esp. Wallace-Hadrill 1988; 1994: 3–64.

¹²⁰ *nobilibus vero, qui honores magistratusque gerundo praestare debent officia civibus, faciunda sunt vestibula regalia, alta atria et peristyla amplissima, silvae ambulationesque laxiores ad decorem maiestatis perfectae; praeterea bybliotheas, pinacothecas, basilicas non dissimili modo quam publicorum operum magnificentia comparatas, quod in domibus eorum saepius et publica consilia et privata iudicia arbitriaque conficiuntur.* Text Callebat 2004: 21. The word *pinacothecas* does not appear in this list in many editions of Vitruvius. In the accompanying *apparatus criticus*, Callebat indicates that the word only occurs in four of the twenty manuscripts examined in the editing of the text, but despite the general rule of textual criticism

Vitruvius offers a very different view of private luxury.¹²¹ Rather than being a needless vanity, the picture gallery, along with other public structures, is a necessary complement to the *maiestas* of a powerful household. As the house of an aristocrat was more than a private, if not entirely public, space, it was necessary that its architecture and decoration should reflect those of public buildings. In other words, for Vitruvius, owning a picture gallery is appropriate to a person of public station. If we are to take the pronouncements of both Vitruvius and figures like Agrippa and Pliny seriously, a paradox thus seems to have faced the cultured Roman aristocrat of the first century BCE. Signs of acculturation, like works of Greek art, were both desirable and censurable, both befitting the aristocratic household and a symptom of moral decline. On some level, this paradox must have been navigable. Augustus is said to have kept at least one panel painting, on which both Protogenes and Apelles had drawn marks, in his house.¹²² Even the moralizing Cicero amassed his own art collections, writing with particular pride of the panel paintings he had installed in a little portico of his villa at Tusculum (*Fam.* 7.23.3). Yet it evidently remained a sufficiently knotty problem that Pliny could bemoan that statues and paintings had been driven into the exile of villas and feel justified that he spoke with the weight of Augustan authority (*HN* 35.26).

There were clearly many other factors involved, but this paradox, the tension between the desire for Greek art and the fear of censure, seems to be intertwined with the drive to create fictive works of Greek art in Roman murals in the first century BCE. By introducing a clearly defined space for figural painting, fictive panel paintings in particular were able to incorporate the kinds of content associated with Greek painting, framed by the formats associated with Greek painting, into the field of the Roman mural. The phenomenon of the mural panel permitted the Roman elite to consume in private a quintessentially Greek art form, while avoiding the censure that the actual display of

that scribes tended to add to rather than to subtract from their manuscripts, there are a number reasons for thinking that *pinacothecas* would have been excised by copyists from this passage, rather than added. The word is extremely rare throughout antiquity, in both Greek and Latin literature, and may have been unfamiliar to a medieval copyist. Moreover, as John Fisher has pointed out to me, the position of *pinacothecas*, between the two phonologically similar words *bybliothecas* and *basilicas*, both much more familiar, could easily have led to its being overlooked or excised. See further discussion of the term in this section.

¹²¹ For discussion see e.g. Coarelli 1989; Nichols 2017: 83–129.

¹²² Plin. *HN* 35.79–83; *DNO* nos. 2870, 2996. We may perhaps also infer that Augustus kept for himself a painting of *Hyakinthos* by Nikias which he had taken from Alexandria, as Pliny indicates that it was only erected in public, in the temple to the Divine Augustus, by his successor Tiberius. Plin. *HN* 35.131; *DNO* nos. 2808–2809.

old master paintings might incur.¹²³ This substitutional aspect of the fictive panel would seem to rest on a distinction between the ethical and aesthetic aspects of art that is not always clear in writers like Pliny. The outlines of such a distinction might be discerned, however, in the Republican writer Varro's treatment of his contemporary Lucius Licinius Lucullus.

Lucullus, consul in 74 BCE, was a highly successful general in the Greek east. His success in the Third Mithridatic War ensured that he became a rich man.¹²⁴ Both famous and infamous, his lifestyle at Rome was known for its extravagance. He evidently lived so lavishly that his name became a byword for dissolute, uncontrolled excess and indulgence in carnal pleasures. Lucullus' interest in Greek material culture is well attested. He was the first to import the colored Greek marble which would bear his name into Italy (Plin *HN* 36.49). We are further told by Pliny that Lucullus took a well-known statue of Herakles as booty during his Mithridatic campaigns and then dedicated it on the *rostra* in the Roman Forum (*HN* 34.93); that he commissioned a great number of other statues (*HN* 34.36); and that he was even on friendly terms with a Greek sculptor named Arcesilaus, who made the cult statue of Venus Genetrix in the Forum of Caesar and whose work Varro had praised.¹²⁵ Apart from these public dedications, however, he devoted a great deal of time to his private estates and collections. Cicero claimed, for instance, that Lucullus' house exhibited so much greed, and was so ostentatious, as to encourage bad behavior in others.¹²⁶ He possessed a private picture gallery which occasioned the earliest surviving appearance, in either Greek or Latin, of the word *pinacotheca* (Varro *Rust.* 1.2.10; 1.59.2).¹²⁷ Varro unfavorably compares the excesses of Lucullus' picture gallery, his *pinacotheca*, with the fruit cellar of a responsible and measured villa owner, which he calls an *oporothea*.

The opposition here would seem to be straightforward. Varro contrasts a needlessly luxurious and idle pursuit, the collection and consumption of Greek painting, with a rustic, purposive, and therefore more traditionally

¹²³ Compare Leach 1982: 159–167; Clarke 1991: 64–65; 2005: 264–280.

¹²⁴ Leach 2004: 87–88. See e.g. Dio Cass. 36; Cic. *Acad.* 2. Diodorus Siculus (4.21.4) called him the richest man in Rome. Athenaeus (6.274e–f; 12.543a) quoting Nicolaos the Peripatetic, asserts that Lucullus had introduced the most luxury into the city of Rome during his triumph.

¹²⁵ Plin. *HN* 35.155–156; *DNO* nos. 3739–3742.

¹²⁶ Cic. *De Leg.* 3.30–31; Cf. Plut. *Luc.* 38–41. Note that, although he castigates Lucullus for his extravagant lifestyle, Plutarch (*Luc.* 42) praises him for his intellectual pursuits, including the formation of an impressive, though private, library. Pliny (*HN* 15.102) reports that Lucullus imported the cherry into Italy from Asia.

¹²⁷ The treatise seems to have been composed in 37 BCE. See Nelsestruen 2015: 2–7.

Roman pursuit, the cultivation of foodstuffs, in this instance fruit.¹²⁸ But the matter is not quite so simple, for Varro does not, in fact, castigate the aesthetic impulse. Rather, he suggests that people dine in their fruit cellars precisely to enjoy the *spectaculum* they present, and thus take aesthetic delight from them. That delight may very well have been fleeting. Most fruit decays quickly and it is not clear how long it would have been preserved in such a space, a point towards which the well-attested Second Style interest in the depiction of healthy, ripe fruit points directly. On the back wall of the *cubiculum* from Boscoreale, for example, a clear bowl containing fruit rests on top of a low screening wall (Figure 3.8).¹²⁹ It serves as a demonstration not only of the skill of the artist in rendering the transparency of the material of the bowl but as a statement of abundance, even excess. The plucked but ripe fruit, moreover, offers a stark contrast to the cultivated but still growing grapevines that crawl over the pergola at the top of the wall and to the wild vines growing around the dark grotto to the right. Humanity and nature are cast in a complex set of interlocking relationships here, which are both practical – fruit is to be eaten, wine to be drunk – and aesthetic. The mural stages a series of frames through which nature can be viewed.

Even the term Varro employs for fruit cellar – *oporothea*, or “fruit gallery” – highlights this inherently aesthetic aspect and emphasizes the parallel the room presents with the picture gallery. *Oporothea*, moreover, is unattested in Greek; it has been suggested that Varro may have coined the term himself.¹³⁰ I would suggest that *pinacotheca* may have been a neologism of Varro’s devising as well. Apart from Varro, there are only eleven other attestations of the term in Latin literature and epigraphy, confined to the works of Vitruvius, Petronius, Pliny the Elder, and a single Antonine inscription.¹³¹ In Greek literature, the term only appears twice, in Strabo’s description of Samos.¹³² Even Pausanias describes the most famous Greek “picture gallery,” in the Propylaia of the Acropolis of Athens, simply as a structure with paintings, rather than explicitly as

¹²⁸ Squire 2009: 408–416; cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1988: 73.

¹²⁹ For the self-reflexive qualities inherent to the depiction of such still-life scenes in Roman wall painting see e.g. Bryson 1990: 17–59; Squire 2009: 357–428; 2017; cf. Croisille 1965; de Caro 2001: 228–244. On the value of transparency see Crawley 2016.

¹³⁰ Leach 2004: 123; Heurgon 2003: 11, no. 31.

¹³¹ In total the *TLL* gives 13 citations of *pinacotheca* in Latin literature and epigraphy: Varr. *Rust.* 1.2.10; 1.59.2; Vit. *De arch.* 1.2.7; 6.3.8; 6.4.2; 6.5.2; 6.7.3; Plin. *HN* 35.2; 35.148; Petron. *Sat.* 83.1; 83.7; 93.3. *CIL* 6.10243, a153.

¹³² See *TLG* s.v. πινακοθήκη; Str. *Geog.* 14.1.14.11; 14.1.14.13. Note, though, that Kweku Garbrah 1988: 73, no. 7 has reconstructed]ενος τήν πινακο[θήκην] in a fragmentary inscription from Chios.



Figure 3.8 *Cubiculum* M, detail of rear wall, Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, mid-first century BCE.

a *pinacotheca*.¹³³ Strabo belonged to the generation after Varro, and he spent many formative years studying in Rome. Might he have taken this term not from a Greek, but from a Latin source?

That Varro acknowledges the aesthetic nature of both picture and fruit gallery is a significant point. It suggests that the censure due to the owner of the picture gallery is not merely due to a reaction against aesthetic pleasures. It may have lain in part in the comparative expense of the

¹³³ Paus. 1.22.6, οἶκημα ἔχον γραφάς.

picture gallery. Cicero's panel paintings in his little portico at Tusculum may not have been exorbitantly priced, but some Greek paintings were, such as the *Aphrodite Anadyomene*, for which Augustus paid 600,000 denarii, and subsequently erected in the Forum of Julius Caesar.¹³⁴ Even less highly prized works sold for substantial amounts of money, such as the Argonauts of Kydias, purchased for 3,600 denarii.¹³⁵ It is these kinds of paintings, I would propose, that men like Lucullus sought for their own collections, and for which they were deemed guilty of luxurious self-indulgence.¹³⁶

Domestic murals with representations of panel paintings potentially addressed the problem facing the conscientious aristocrat by being aesthetically fulfilling but comparatively cheap. Several pieces of evidence suggest that fresco painting could serve as a cost-effective and ethically acceptable substitute for panel paintings or other kinds of artworks. The first comes from the Edict of Diocletian on Maximum Prices, issued in 301 CE.¹³⁷ This edict asserts that the figure-painter, or *pictor imaginarius*, could earn as much as 150 denarii a day (7.8–9), which made him the highest paid of all laborers working for a daily wage. By contrast the simple wall painter, or *pictor parietarius*, was paid only 75 denarii a day. It is unclear how much weight the edict should be afforded as evidence for painting of the first centuries BCE and CE. It postdates that material by several centuries, and given the devaluation of the coinage between the first century and the time of Diocletian, the wages it stipulates would likely have been significantly lower during the late Republic and early Empire.¹³⁸ Moreover, although the *pictor imaginarius* must have been a figure painter of some kind, the edict does not specify in what medium he would have worked: mural, panel, or like the Alexandrian painter Theophilos, both.¹³⁹ But if the Price Edict of Diocletian provides even a rough model for earlier costs, then commissioning mural painting

¹³⁴ Strab. 14.2.19; Ov. *Trist.* 2.521–528; Plin. *HN* 35.9.1; *DNO* nos. 2877–2897.

¹³⁵ Plin. *HN* 35.78; *DNO* nos. 2838–2841, esp. 2838.

¹³⁶ Indeed Wallace-Hadrill suggests that the private picture galleries of Republican potentates like Lucullus must have served an explicitly political function precisely because they would have vied in grandeur with public display spaces. Wallace-Hadrill 1988: 73; cf. Rouveret 1987a; 2007.

¹³⁷ For the text of the edict see: Graser 1940: 305–321, esp. 338–339. Cf. Andersen 1985; Ling 1991: 213; Elsner 1998; Clarke 2010: 203–204; Esposito 2011: 66–68.

¹³⁸ See e.g. Abdy 2012: 588–590.

¹³⁹ For Theophilos see P.Cair.Zen.3.59445; PSI 4.407; *DNO* nos. 3054–3054a–c. It has also been suggested that the *pictor imaginarius* was specifically a portrait painter. See Calabi Limentani 1958: 66; Andersen 1985: 113; cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1454b9; Plin. *HN* 35.4; 35.11; 35.88.

would have been significantly more economical than buying masterpieces like the *Aphrodite Anadyomene*.¹⁴⁰

A more contemporary indication of the relative price of wall painting appears in Pliny's discussion of the Augustan painter Studius (*HN* 35.116–117). Studius, Pliny relates, was the first painter to depict certain kinds of landscape scenes on walls; such scenes were noteworthy because they were both visually pleasing and, importantly, cheap.¹⁴¹ A final piece of evidence is provided by two inscriptions on statue bases set up outside the Pyramid of Gaius Cestius.¹⁴² The inscriptions named Cestius' heirs, and specified that Cestius had desired that Pergamene tapestries, famed for their gold thread, be placed in his tomb.¹⁴³ To do so was forbidden, however, *per edictum aedilis*, by edict of the aedile.¹⁴⁴ The prohibition may have been in accordance with Augustan sumptuary legislation, but whatever the justification, the tapestries were sold and the money raised was used to erect the statues.¹⁴⁵ The tomb chamber was subsequently decorated with mural paintings (Figure 3.9). The inscriptions do not specify precisely how the Pergamene textiles would have been employed, but one possible interpretation is that the paintings occupy the position on the walls of the small tomb chamber where the tapestries themselves may have been hung.¹⁴⁶ Although Propertius does speak of a body being laid out on Attalid cloth as a sign of a lavish funeral (2.13.22; cf. 3.18.19), Valerius Maximus cites an instance in which Pergamene tapestries hung

¹⁴⁰ For the organization and working practices of painters' workshops at Pompeii see e.g. Varone 1995; Esposito 2009: esp. 15–47; Esposito 2011. Note as well that Theophilus specifies in a letter to Zenon (P.Cair.Zen.3.59445) that the wages he is owed will be lower if the patron agrees to provide for the materials. See Nowicka 1984: 256–257; Scheibler 2003: 189–192.

¹⁴¹ Plin. *HN* 35.117: “with an extremely charming appearance and at a very low cost” (*blandissimo aspectu minimoque impendio*).

¹⁴² See *CIL* 6.1374; Ridley 1992. Cf. Krause in *LTUR* IV, 278–279, s.v. Sepulcrum: C. Cestius; Coarelli 2007: 346–347; Claridge 2010: 397–410.

¹⁴³ For Pergamene tapestries see e.g. Plin. *HN* 8.196; 33.63. ¹⁴⁴ *CIL* 6.1375.

¹⁴⁵ Although Cicero (*Leg.* 2.60) reports that it was forbidden already in the Twelve Tables to bury gold. See Ridley 1992: 10. More generally, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has emphasized that the long history of Roman sumptuary legislation tended to focus not on durable goods, but rather on behavior, food, and banqueting practices. Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 315–355. Emmanuela Zanda's survey of sumptuary legislation from the Republic and the Principate seems to confirm that none of the known sumptuary laws regulated works of art, although some durable goods, such as clothing and jewelry, were restricted at various times. Zanda 2011: esp. 113–128.

¹⁴⁶ The tomb chamber at the pyramid is the only room within it, and was evidently sealed off upon completion of the monument. There is a robber's tunnel in the back of the chamber, and the current entrance dates to the early modern period. As Fabio Barry has pointed out to me, however, the painters must have left the chamber by some means or another. The likely conclusion is that the current entryway to the tomb chamber corresponds to an ancient approach. Both the frescoes and the statue bases were reproduced in prints by Pietro Santi Bartoli upon their excavation. See e.g. Claridge 2010: 410, figs. 185–186.



Figure 3.9 Tomb chamber, Pyramid of Gaius Cestius, Rome, late first century BCE.

on walls (9.1.5). The paintings in the pyramid may thus have served as replacements or substitutes for the more opulent gold tapestries that Cestius had originally desired.

Genre and Politics

This takes us back to the painting of painting in the first-century BCE structures on the Palatine Hill. Were such paintings meant to be replacements for the more expensive, more lauded Greek masterpieces that the same kinds of aristocrats, and perhaps even the very same individuals, were dedicating in such numbers in public spaces? I would suggest that they were, but perhaps not in a literal or limiting way, and they were certainly not only replacements, but also expansions of and commentaries upon the status of such masterpieces. This critical, self-reflexive aspect of the fictive

panel must have been a crucial part of its success across Roman society and through at least a century of production. After all, if the painting of painting had only appealed to the highest echelon of the elite, if it had only served the ethical function of substituting for the genuine masterpiece, then it seems unlikely that the format would have proven so popular over such a long period of time in a place like Pompeii. By the same token, if the fictive panel were only allusive – a fundamentally aspirational mimicry of an otherwise unattainable Greek original – then why should elite patrons, such as the inhabitants of the most desirable residences in the city of Rome on the Palatine Hill, have bothered to commission it? It must have struck a balance between ethical and aesthetic imperatives as well as between doubling and disruption, between the straightforward replication of an art form associated with Greece and the erudite, even subversive commentary upon that art form.¹⁴⁷

Of note here is the rather wide variety of content within a relatively few formats of fictive panel. Still lifes, sacrificial scenes, a wide variety of landscapes, and mythological scenes all appear inside shuttered and embedded panels in these houses. Teasing out the dynamics of the relationship between format and content risks circularity as much as allegorical or allusive interpretations, but two paths would seem to lead from this point. On the one hand, as [Chapter 2](#) suggested, these various genres are all given space on the Roman wall by virtue of the painting of painting. On the other hand, the evidence presented in this chapter offers another possibility: that the format of the panel painting was just as much an object of imitation as any of the content it bore.

One way to parse the significance of this point is by analogy to literature. The fictive panel, I propose, served as what Gregory Hutchinson has called a super-genre, a specific figural form, with an attendant history and set of associations, which announced the significance of its internal subject matter without predetermining what that subject matter might be.¹⁴⁸ In the literary realm a super-genre is a body of writing, such as hexameter, elegaic, or even drama, which includes a variety of generic sub-sets. In the case of hexameter this might be epic, didactic, or oracular poetry; in the case of drama it would include tragedy and comedy. The super-genre acts like a frame, demarcating some modes of literary writing as distinct while providing grounds for others to produce related meanings. The fictive panel painting functions as a super-genre insofar as it provides

¹⁴⁷ See e.g. Leach [1982](#); cf. Leach [2004](#): 152–155. ¹⁴⁸ Hutchinson [2013](#); [2014](#).

a common ground for the execution of genres like myth and landscape that previously had been granted little room on the Roman wall.

As a kind of super-genre, the fictive panel created space for a variety of painting genres on the Roman wall, but it did not pre-determine the specific content of those genres. In this way, the fictive panel could be political – at least insofar as it made an ethical statement as part of the presentation of a patron's public persona – without necessarily being partisan, that is, without displaying overt political content or expressing any particular contemporary political point of view. This is perhaps an unusual sense of the political – understood here as an ethical gesture unrelated to any particular ideology – which may explain why, although Eleanor Winsor Leach has explicitly argued that the inherent flexibility of the painting of painting in the mid-first century BCE accounted for its popularity, she and other scholars have been reluctant to adopt overtly political readings of first-century paintings, in part because the format was apparently not attached to a specific iconographic message.¹⁴⁹

The logic of the super-genre appears to be at play in one of the relatively few examples of the painting of painting known outside Italy, the decoration of the so-called Royal Box of Herod's theater at Herodium, in Judea.¹⁵⁰ Executed in paint and stucco, this decoration depicts a polychrome marble parapet wall, above which meticulously rendered shuttered panels are set between pilasters. Particular attention has been paid the panels' mode of display, as they both hang on cords from nails and rest on brackets (Figures 3.10 and 3.11).¹⁵¹ Many of the panels have dramatically faded, but a variety of genres can still be discerned: a kind of sacred or Nilotic landscape, a ship at full sail packed with armed men, and a banquet scene. Herod's friendship with Marcus Agrippa was attested in antiquity (Jos. *Ant. Jud.* 16.12–65), suggesting that the inspiration for these panels may have come from Italy. The murals decorating the royal box, including the fictive panels, moreover, were executed *a secco* rather than in true fresco, perhaps indicating that they were finished in some haste prior to Agrippa's visit to Herodium in 15 BCE.¹⁵²

The technique of execution and the Nilotic landscape, however, have also led to the proposal that the artists responsible for the paintings came

¹⁴⁹ Leach 1982; Clarke 2005; Moormann 2013; although *contra* cf. e.g. Brendel 1979: 172; Zanker 1988: 279–291; Pappalardo 2015.

¹⁵⁰ See also e.g. a mural from Trier, though dated much later: Santoro 2007; Ghedini and Salvo 2015: 113.

¹⁵¹ Netzer *et al.* 2010; Rozenberg 2013; Ovadia 2013; Ovadia and Turnheim 2013; cf. Rozenberg 2009; Teverson 2015: 38–110.

¹⁵² Rozenberg 2013: 174–189.



Figure 3.10 Royal box, theater at Herodium, Judea, late first century BCE.

to Judea from Alexandria.¹⁵³ Given that examples of painted panels with shutters appear on Italian walls decades before the paintings from Herodium, and given the prevalence of Egyptian motifs in late Republican painting, the direct appeal to Alexandria, from which so little material survives, seems unnecessary. The Herodium paintings do not resemble tomb painting documented from Alexandria particularly closely, though both the examples from Italy and those from Judea may very well be participating in a broader visual *koiné* circulating throughout the Mediterranean, including Egypt.¹⁵⁴ Yet whatever their point of origin, the Herodium paintings offer a very close parallel to the examples known in Italy, if not in every aspect of style then certainly in their overall conceit – a fictive architectural space punctuated by the representation of artworks. For Herod, as much for the inhabitants of the Palatine, commissioning art was a deeply political act, and the representation of representation offered a way of participating in an international visual culture.

Elizabeth Rawson connected the widespread dedication of public art displays in the middle decades of the first century BCE, and the concomitant debate over whether art should primarily serve a private or a public

¹⁵³ Rozenberg 2013: 188–189. Although note that some Alexandrian tomb paintings, such as the Sâqiya Tomb, were executed in true fresco. See Venit 2002: 104.

¹⁵⁴ See e.g. Adriani 1966; Venit 2002; McKenzie 2007: 96–112.



Figure 3.11 Detail, royal box, theater at Herodium, Judea, late first century BCE.

good, with contemporary political parties.¹⁵⁵ Julius Caesar's association with the *populares*, the political faction representing the interests of the broader Roman people in opposition to the narrow interests of the senatorial class, Rawson asserts, may have driven his interest in public display of art. Augustus merely perpetuated this tendency. But as I have attempted to show in this chapter, the discourse of art has much deeper roots, passing through Cicero to Cato the Elder and likely beyond. It was not solely a matter of contemporary political jockeying. The same point could be extended to the fictive painted panel. In its earliest manifestations in the city of Rome, the fictive panel need not be aligned with any specific political faction or ideology. Its deployment, I argue, is political insofar as it is ethical, a display, if not practice, of moderation in the face of excess.

A kind of doublethink is involved in this action, an ability to separate the ethical from the aesthetic dimensions of art consumption. This kind of separation is evident in Varro's discussion of Lucullus' tastes, and in many ways the entire Augustan project, with its apparently paradoxical claim of both following the examples of the ancestors and setting forth new

¹⁵⁵ Rawson 1985: 114. Pliny (*HN* 35.24) does assert that Caesar was most responsible for the high esteem in which Greek panel painting was held among the Roman populace because he had dedicated a number of especially important paintings in his public buildings.

examples for posterity to follow, depends precisely on the co-existence of mutually exclusive elements.¹⁵⁶ Romans of the first century BCE were no strangers to contradiction and paradox, and the fictive panel seems to have played precisely to that point as an act of cultural negotiation fraught with political overtones, even when it did not communicate a clear partisan message.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Squire 2013c.

4 | Transparent and Opaque: Medium and Materiality on the Roman Wall

One of the great powers of a mature tradition of illusionistic painting is to clearly and unambiguously figure other media within itself. A painting can show a building, a statue, or another painting in a way that, for example, a relief sculpture cannot show a painting, not without permitting the possibility that it is in fact showing another relief sculpture. Despite this power to encapsulate other media, however, Roman paintings of painting tended to delight in ambiguity. But in its ambiguities, this chapter argues, the phenomenon of the fictive panel demonstrates complex thinking about the role of medium and material in Roman art. Roman muralists produced a layered and self-aware web of representational strategies, marked both by the deployment of techniques of illusion and immersion and by the subversion of those techniques through the depiction of other media. The painting of painting permitted these artists to explore meta-pictoriality by putting their objects and methods of representation into productive tension with one another, thereby problematizing the very act of representation itself.

Painted panels were not only objects of representation, they were, in turn, representing objects, and their appearance within Roman frescoes was an act of transformation from one medium to another.¹ The central tension of that transformation revolved around the degree of medium transferability from panel to mural. A concept developed in linguistics, medium transferability is typically characterized as the capacity of language to be expressed with the same meaning in more than one medium, namely, in both speech and writing.² According to this formulation, the message of the medium-transferable utterance is the same, regardless of whether it is heard or read. Both ancient panels and murals were pictorial media, marks on a two-dimensional surface which aimed to produce the sensation of a three-dimensional reality, and in many respects they were highly transferable. But there were limits to that transferability. The mural,

¹ For the play of intermediality between panel and mural, see e.g. Brilliant 1984: 77–80; Bergmann 1995: 102–107; Hackworth Petersen 2006: 142–144; Wamberg 2009: 443–445; cf. Bergmann 2007: 92–97.

² Lyons 1981: 11.

for example, is imbued with a potential for immersion that is typically denied the portable panel. The mural uses that immersive potential to represent the panel within itself as both just one more fiction among others and as a distinct entity with its own capacity to produce fictions.

In other words, Roman painters did not simply transfer the panel to the mural, they remediated the panel by means of the mural. Marshall McLuhan proposed that the content of any one medium is always another medium;³ Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin have called this refashioning of one medium within another remediation.⁴ It is characterized especially by a double logic oscillating between immediacy and hypermediacy. Immediacy strives for the total dissolution of medium. It seeks to produce the sensation of access to the thing itself through the affectation of transparency. Hypermediacy, by contrast, multiplies and deliberately makes visible the signs of mediation. It acknowledges medium as medium, and aims toward opacity. I argue in this chapter that the Roman painting of painting explores questions of medium with great sophistication and that it is especially marked by the double logic of immediacy and hypermediacy. Roman meta-painting blurs boundaries between media, materials, and dimensions, inviting us to look through it only to counter that invitation through the assertion of its surface, and deliberately playing on the ambiguous border of reality and representation.

The Duplicity of Medium

The play of transparency and opacity runs as a leitmotif across the painting of painting on Roman walls, but it is brought out especially acutely in the decoration of the *tablinum* of the House of Livia on the Palatine Hill ([Plate 7](#)).⁵ The decoration of approximately half of the rear wall and most of the right-hand wall of this room survive. The right-hand wall shows an abbreviated version of the stage-front of a theater building ([Figure 4.1](#)). A low dado supports a narrow stage, behind which stands a vibrant red backing wall decorated with architectural sculpture and representations of candelabra. Above it we see an undifferentiated white background,

³ McLuhan 1964: 1. ⁴ Bolter and Grusin 1999.

⁵ For the paintings in the house, see e.g. Rizzo 1936b; cf. Rodenwaldt 1909: 10–12, 36–38, 228–232; Cagian de Azevedo 1949; Peters 1963: 35–47; Leach 1982: 159–164; Ehrhardt 1987: 15–16; Moormann 1988: 232–233; Scheibler 1994: 65–67; Galinsky 1996: 179–196; Grüner 2004: 197–199; Leach 2004: 134–135.



Figure 4.1 *Tablinum*, House of Livia, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE. Lithograph of right wall by Gregorio Mariani, 1871. After *Monumenti Inediti*, vol. 11, 1880: pl. 22.

punctuated only by the curving colonnade of a *schola* and the faint indications of tree branches at each of its outermost edges.

Two thin white columns rise from the stage to support entablatures extending out from the backing wall. Two larger white columns, rising from podia projecting from the stage, support a green, coffered ceiling, of which only a small part has survived. A large central panel showing the mythological scene of Io, Argus, and Hermes sits in the middle of the backing wall. Above the panel an elaborate entablature rises to the ceiling, creating, in conjunction with the framing white columns, the effect of an *aedicula* meant to house and protect the painting. Two shuttered panels, one heavily damaged, sit on the cornice of the backing wall to either side of the central *aedicula*. At the far left end of the wall, a heavily damaged white rectangle appears to show a street scene with both human figures and substantial architectural structures. This scene, which was likely repeated on the right side of the wall, may represent a *periaktos*, according to Vitruvius a rotating, painted wooden board placed at the wings of a theater's stage building, whose decoration would help set the scene of a play (*De arch.* 5.6.9).

In a structurally oriented reading of this painting, Guido Kaschnitz von Weinberg highlighted the relation of medium and materiality and the interplay of fiction and reality by focusing on the mural's central paradox: that it simultaneously calls attention to the physical plane of the wall and

the artificiality of painting techniques and, via that artifice, promises a bewitching alternative to lived reality.⁶ This may be a paradox common to all artistic representation, but the tension between reality and illusion is especially acute in the House of Livia. It is worth noting, moreover, that Weinberg took the second-order fiction of the central panel for a simple aperture, a window on to a world beyond the wall. This was perhaps no accident. By placing the imitation of a panel painting, that is, a notionally opaque surface, in the center of the composition at the point where the quasi-perspectival system of the wall's depicted architecture would lead us to look deep into pictorial space, the painters of the House of Livia fresco tangibly elicit confusion. The status of these central scenes was hotly debated among scholars in the early twentieth century. Some proposed that they represented panel paintings and others prospects; even among those who believed that they were fictive panels, the manner in which they were displayed among the illusionistic architecture was disputed.⁷ We may consider a third option: that, as the intensity of the debate itself attests, it was in part left to the viewer to decide between panel and prospect.⁸

The medial status of the mural panel, in other words, was left ambiguous. In the *tablinum* of the House of Livia, its ambiguity revolves around the muralist's pointed use of the color white. Shades of white are used in four distinct areas on the right-hand wall of the *tablinum*: for architectural members such as the columns and cornice; for the blank background that sits above the architecture of the stage building; for the background of the scene on the far left of the wall; and for the background of the central panel. The chromatic overlap creates both spatial and conceptual confusion. In each of these areas, white can indicate something different. When used for architectural members, it must represent a solid object – white marble, presumably, or its imitation in plaster. When deployed as a blank background, however, white appears to depict immateriality, something diaphanous and transparent. Even more complexly, the white of the fictive panel, especially of the central embedded panel, must fulfill two mediating roles – serving simultaneously as both material support and immaterial atmosphere.

The use of white to indicate a solid material object is a relatively straightforward pictorial convention, and was long attested in Roman painting, but the use of the same color to denote atmosphere is more complex.

⁶ Kaschnitz von Weinberg 1965: 478.

⁷ See e.g. Mau 1902; 1903; Petersen 1903. For a summary of the various debates, see especially Ehlich 1953: 122–138.

⁸ Cf. Bergmann 2007: 95.

This is most apparent on the uppermost register of the wall, where the white background meets the remains of the painted green, coffered ceiling. The spatial ambiguity of this meeting point is brought out by a comparison with the Room of the Masks at the so-called House of Augustus (Plate 4). The ceiling in the *tablinum* of the House of Livia extends backwards from the plane of the wall for two rows of coffering, but then seems to end in an ambiguous relation to the unreadable space of the all-white background. In the Room of the Masks, the firm anchoring of the uppermost ceiling into a final backing wall, legible as such, due both to its own fictive projection and recession and to the shadows cast on it by the ceiling, were indications that the fictive architecture depicted in the room was confined within a finite amount of space bordered by plastered walls. This space was not so much larger than the actual space of the room itself.

In the *tablinum* of the House of Livia, by contrast, spatial security has been stripped away. Although the final depth interval in the picture, the white background, is executed in the same color as at the Room of the Masks, the ambiguous termination of the upper ceiling, and the curved colonnades of the *schola* set at a depth clearly behind the termination of the ceiling, combine for a reversed, vertiginous effect. There is no obvious end to the space behind the fictive stage front; it could, conceivably, extend infinitely. White here is potentially both an atmospheric effect and nothing at all. Something like this same conceit is visible in Second Style paintings, such as Boscoreale, where the color blue is employed near the top of the painting to indicate an expanse of sky (Plate 1). It also appears in Room 22 of the House of the Cryptoporticus in Pompeii (I.6.2), where we see a portico with lifelike herms supporting projecting architrave blocks and a coffered ceiling in front of a red backing wall (Figure 4.2).⁹ On the cornice of that wall are a number of shuttered panels with scenes of still lifes, sacrifices, and other figural scenes.¹⁰ Behind those panels, however, is an expanse of black, another color field which could serve to indicate, variously, a dark, exotic stone, the deep shadow of a recessed space behind the portico, or perhaps nothing, pure negation.

The white of the upper register in the House of Livia *tablinum* is distinct, however, from the use of the same color directly below it in the *periaktos*-like city scene at the far left. Here we have the sense of looking through an embrasure on to a space behind the stage building. Yet the space of the *periaktos* does not match that of the curved colonnade of the *schola* directly

⁹ See e.g. PPM 1.250–273; Spinazzola 1953: 448–531; Moorman 1988: 143–144; Squire 2009: 357–428; 2017: 251–253.

¹⁰ See Scheibler 1998: 9–14.

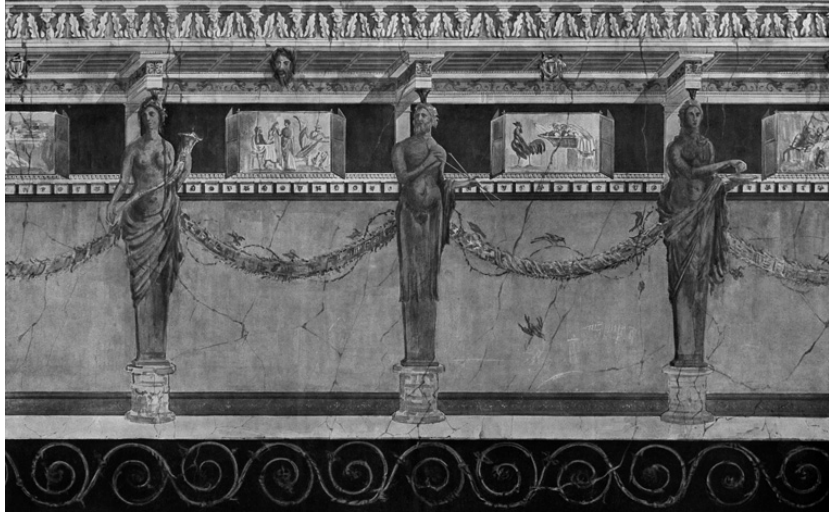


Figure 4.2 Room 22, House of the Cryptoporticus, Pompeii (I.6.2), mid- to late first century BCE. After Spinazzola 1953: pl. 21.

above it, separated only by a thin portion of the red stage building. The colonnade appears to be set significantly closer to the picture plane than the buildings of the street scene, though it too lies behind the plane of the stage building. What then is it resting on, that does not otherwise obscure the view of the people and buildings below it? Perhaps each area represents a discrete prospect over an unconnected place, or perhaps the scene is indeed a *periaktos*, a representation of a painting on wood and thus a false prospect, not a window but another independent plane of representation.

The central mythological scene plays upon the same tensions. Michelangelo Cagiano de Azevedo demonstrated in the mid-twentieth century that this scene was executed by a specialist painter on a reserved area of the wall, and I have suggested that scenes like this correspond to the descriptions of embedded panels in the Delian inventories.¹¹ On the right wall, Io sits on a rock in the foreground; Argus, the guardian set by Hera, watches over her. A statue of a female deity, perhaps Hera, rises up on a pillar set directly behind the figure of Io. Behind that statue is a boulder, around which Hermes approaches, and behind him, finally, we see further rock formations and a large, spreading tree. This layering of depth intervals on such a large scale was unusual for Roman figural painting; the fact that it plays out against a white background has significant ramifications.

¹¹ Cagiano de Azevedo 1949.

Plates



Plate 1 *Cubiculum M*, Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, mid-first century BCE.



Plate 2 Room of the Mysteries, Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, mid-first century BCE.



Plate 3 *Tablinum*, House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto, Pompeii (V.4.a), early to mid-first century CE.



Plate 4 Room of the Masks, House of Augustus, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE.



Plate 5 Upper *Cubiculum*, House of Augustus, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE.

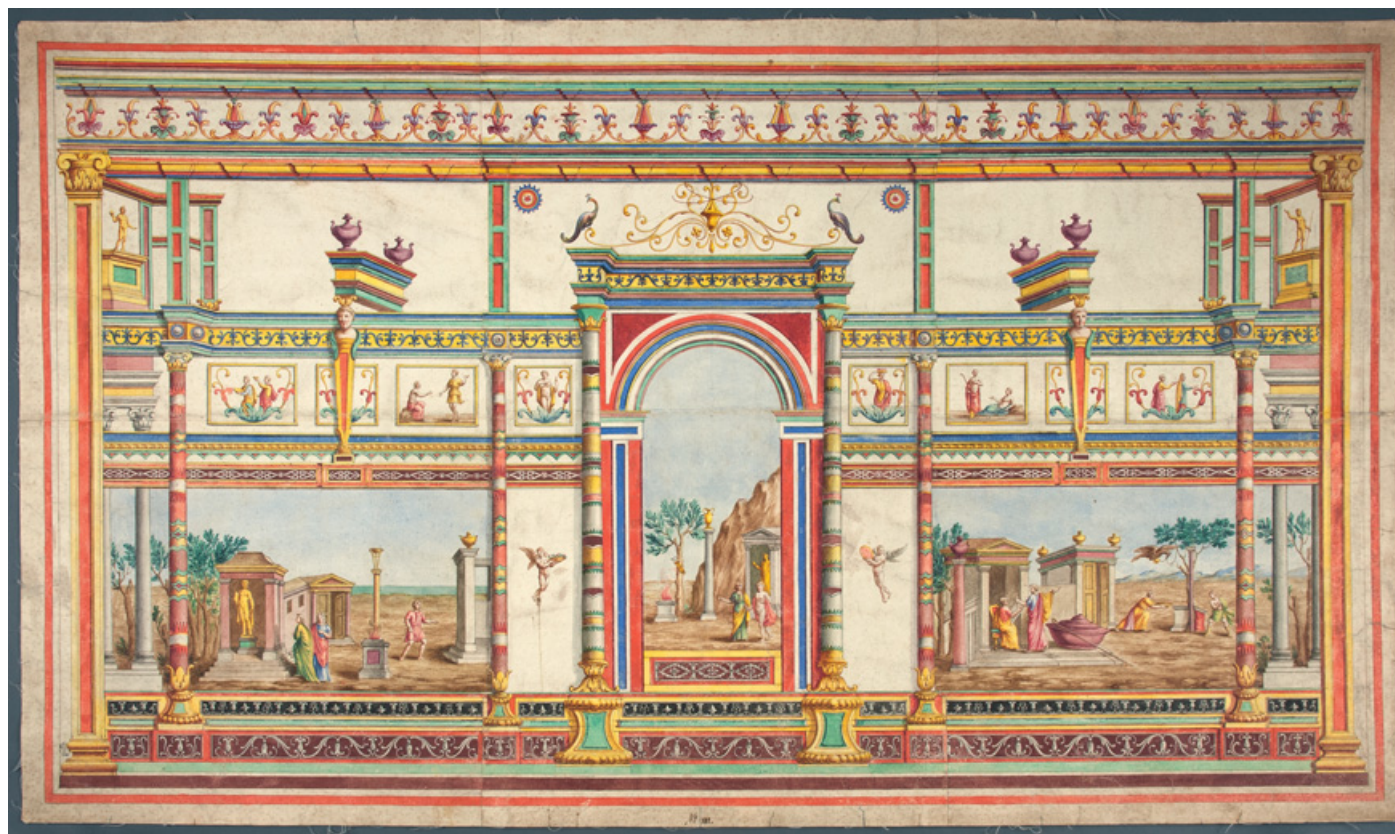


Plate 6 Aula Isiaca, Palatine Hill, Rome, late first century BCE. Watercolor, likely by F. Bartoli.



Plate 7 *Tablinum*, House of Livia, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE.



Plate 8 *Cubiculum* E, Villa della Farnesina, Rome, late first century BCE.



Plate 9 Painting from a villa near Portici, late first century BCE.



Plate 10 Garden Room, Villa of Livia at Prima Porta, late first century BCE.



Plate 11 Room 32, House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii (VI.17.42), early first century CE.



Plate 12 Back wall of the garden, House of the Marine Venus, Pompeii (II.3.3), mid-first century CE.



Plate 13 Painting from Pompeii VI.17.41, mid- to late first century BCE.



Plate 14 *Cubiculum* B, left wall, Villa della Farnesina, Rome, late first century BCE.



Plate 15 *Cubiculum* B, alcove wall, Villa della Farnesina, Rome, late first century BCE.

Where the white of the upper background is the white of mere atmosphere, of a potentially infinite regression, and the white of the columns represents the impenetrable solidity of stone, our perception of the *periaktos* and the embedded panel depends on a dual use of white. The first signifies the material of the panel itself, which, within the first-order fiction of the room's architectural painting, is a real physical entity. This perhaps is the white of marble, such as the white marble panels known from Herculaneum or the slabs of stone upon which Nikias was said to paint.¹² Or perhaps it is simply the white of a prepared wooden board, such as those mentioned in the Delian inventories.¹³ In either instance, it denotes the physical ground of a panel painting, a literal surface.

The second use, however, is analogous to the white in the uppermost register. In this sense white has been used to indicate the metaphorical or fictional ground of the painting. It is the atmosphere that surrounds the figures, gives them space in which they can exist, and, by extension, stands between the viewers external to, and the actors within, the painting.¹⁴ The evident paradox is striking: how can one block of color both represent the absolute solidity and opacity of a hard surface and the immateriality and transparency of air? It can do so only because its representation of solidity serves as the staging ground for a further fiction, that is, the white of the panel's surface must once again be dissolved in order that we see the mythological scene painted on it.

The dual logic of immediacy and hypermediacy is key here. For Louis Marin this dialectic between transparency and opacity – the capacity of the opaque surface of the painting to reflect back the world that the transparent window of the picture purported to show – was the defining feature of pictorial representation in early modernity.¹⁵ Remarkable in our case is that the tension between transparency and opacity plays out on an already fictive plane. The only true surface is the stuccoed, pigmented, and polished surface of the actual wall. On that physical surface the first-order fiction of the fictive panel's own notional surface precedes the second-order fiction of its interior. The panel must exist within the illusionistic world staged by its architectural surroundings before it can disrupt the coherence of that illusion.

¹² See e.g. Mielsch 1979; Graeve 1984 for the Herculaneum panels. Pausanias (7.22.6) says that Nikias had painted a white marble tombstone at Triteia in Achaia. Cf. *DNO* no. 2817.

¹³ *ID* 3.1412 a.43; cf. *ID* 3.1417 A.2.14.

¹⁴ Blanckenhagen and Alexander 1990: 21–26; 37; cf. Summers 2003: 453.

¹⁵ Marin 1989; 1998; Krüger 2001: esp. 27–45.

Media and Mediation

It might be argued that this articulation of medium in Roman painting is anachronistic.¹⁶ In contemporary parlance the term “medium” tends to signify any means of storing or transmitting information. It is applied to the visual arts as a way of distinguishing the kind of information they store and the way they transmit it. Sculpture and painting, accordingly, are today considered different artistic media because their means of delivering visual information differ. In antiquity, however, that may not have been the case. Although *medium* is a Latin word, it evidently did not correspond to a medium of representation; neither the Greeks nor Romans possessed the same ontological concept of medium that allows us to say that television, radio, sculpture, painting, and print are all media. There was little ancient media theory to speak of. But we might identify a “medium-consciousness,” among the Greeks and Romans, as an awareness of medium distinct from mere material or form.¹⁷ And even in the absence of a verbal articulation of the concept of the medium, I would contend, we can isolate instrumental uses of each of the dual aspects of the medium of the fictive panel I have highlighted here – its simultaneous solidity and evanescence.

Such medium-consciousness could be articulated through aesthetic responses to material properties. Marble was particularly rich in its polysemy, viewed as both a shining source of light and as the absence of color, as both a solid surface and a shimmering, shifting fluid.¹⁸ Other stones were similarly expressive. In the recently discovered collection of Hellenistic epigrams by Posidippus, the first group of poems is devoted to precious stones.¹⁹ The poet takes particular care to highlight the effects such stones produce on the beholder, in one instance apparently discussing the change in such effects brought about by the application of oil to the object’s surface.²⁰ But the communicative function of medium could equally be emphasized. Pliny’s division of his art-historical books into media, which is organized precisely by the topic of material support – metal, stone, etc. – and regulated by a clear vocabulary of art objects including statues, *signa*, and panel paintings, *tabellae*, points toward precisely just such an instrumental sense of medium

¹⁶ See for instance: McLuhan *et al.* 1987: 429; cited in Kittler 2009: 24–26; Hagen 2008.

¹⁷ Goodman 2004: 18. ¹⁸ See e.g. Barry 2007; 2011.

¹⁹ Austin and Bastianini 2002: 22–43, nos. 1–20; cf. e.g. Lelli 2004; Hunter 2004; Schur 2004; Smith 2004; Bing 2005; Kuttner 2005; Prioux, 2008: 173–177; 2015.

²⁰ Austin and Bastianini 2002: 34–35, no. 13.

(HN 34–36).²¹ As the references to the materials of painted panels throughout the Delian inventories attest, the physical supports of paintings were considered to be integral to their existence as discrete objects. Different modes of representation were also thought to have different capacities – different strengths and weaknesses. In the first century BCE both Cicero (*Orat.* 2.357) and Horace (*Ars poet.* 180–182) proclaimed that the visual presentation of information contained a certain immediate and vivid clarity that oral presentation lacked, or achieved only with great difficulty. Hellenistic and Roman poets and orators actively sought after that quality of immediacy; literary critics called it *enargeia*, and closely linked it with the faculty of sight.²² The point, here, is that rhetorical effects which seemed to be the natural byproducts of certain media were actively sought after in others.

The so-called *tabula picta* problem, known from juridical writings, shows how difficult it could be to distinguish between the material from which a painting had been made and the essence of the painting.²³ In this hypothetical legal case, the jurist was asked to decide whether a patron or a painter had the right to a panel painting whose ownership was in dispute. If the former, it was because he had paid for the physical material out of which the painting had been made. If the latter, it was because he had combined those materials in such a way as to create a new entity independent of its material substrate. He had created the artistic medium of a painting, we might say today. A number of other issues come into play in the resolution of this question, including the value of the labor of the artist and the question of intellectual property, but the debates demonstrate that the process of conceptually separating a painting from its material support, of distinguishing between material, form, and medium was possible, though it required careful legal argument.

What of the more ethereal medium indicated by the color white in the *tablinum* of the House of Livia? This was perhaps already an old idea by the first century BCE. In his discussion of perception in the *De Anima*, Aristotle deploys the term *to metaxu*, “that which is in between,” that is, between the object of perception and the perceiver. This betweenness allows perception to take place; we might say that it mediates between

²¹ For a scintillating discussion of rock crystal as a medium in Pliny and beyond, see Crawley 2016.

²² Dion Hal. *Lys* 7; Quint. *Inst.* 6.2.29–32. Cf. e.g. Zanker 1981: 297–311; 2004: 9, 17, 25–30; Leach 1988: 3–24; Webb 2009; Squire 2009; Bussels 2012: 37–82.

²³ Just. *Inst.* 2.1.34; cf. Gaius *Inst.* 2.78; Just. *Dig.* 10.4.3.14; 41.1.9.2. Cf. e.g. Lucrezi 1984; Madero 2010; Plisecka 2011; Squire 2015b: 307–308.

perceiver and object. Aristotle's discussion of sight is particularly germane to our topic (*De an.* 419a14–22):

Color moves the transparent thing, that is the air, and since this is continuous it moves against the sense organ. Democritus is mistaken in thinking that if the intervening space were empty, even an ant in the sky would be clearly visible, for this is impossible. For seeing occurs when the faculty of sense perception is acted upon, and as it is impossible that it be acted upon by the actual color seen, there remains only the intervening medium to act upon it, so that some such medium must exist. Indeed if the intervening space were empty, rather than accurate vision, nothing would be seen at all.²⁴

Scholars have debated how literally the passage should be interpreted. For some, the term *to metaxu* does not indicate an actual substance.²⁵ To claim so is merely to impose a modern ontological concept of medium onto Aristotelian thought. Rather, Aristotle may employ *to metaxu* only to indicate the distance between object and perceiver necessary for perception to occur. But if *to metaxu* connotes the instrumental nature of the medium of perception, we do not necessarily need a preexisting ontological concept.²⁶ Friedrich Kittler pushes even further: “‘In the middle’ of absence and presence, farness and nearness, being and soul, there exists no nothing any more, but a mediatic relation.”²⁷ The “nothing” to which Kittler here refers is evidently the void of Democritean atomism (*to kenon*), against which Aristotle is arguing. Democritus' own position is difficult to reconstruct, but at least one atomist perspective is articulated in a Roman context in a passage from the late Republican Epicurean philosopher Lucretius' poem *De Rerum Natura* (4.26–89).²⁸ Lucretius explains that all objects shed images of themselves (*simulacra*); these peel off like films (*membranae*) and fly through the atmosphere (*per auras*) in all directions. Perception occurs when such *simulacra* encounter the human eye.

²⁴ ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν χρῶμα κινεῖ τὸ διαφανές, οἷον τὸν ἀέρα, ὑπὸ τούτου δὲ συνεχοῦς ὄντος κινεῖται τὸ αἰσθητήριον. οὐ γὰρ καλῶς τοῦτο λέγει Δημόκριτος οἰόμενος, εἰ γένοιτο κενὸν τὸ μεταξύ, ὁρᾶσθαι ἂν ἀκριβῶς καὶ εἰ μύρμηξ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ εἴη· τοῦτο γὰρ ἀδύνατόν ἐστιν. πάσχοντος γὰρ τι τοῦ αἰσθητικοῦ γίνεται τὸ ὁρᾶν· ὑπ' αὐτοῦ μὲν οὖν τοῦ ὁρωμένου χρώματος ἀδύνατον, λείπεται δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ μεταξύ, ὥστ' ἀναγκαῖόν τι εἶναι μεταξύ· κενοῦ δὲ γενομένου οὐχ ὅτι ἀκριβῶς, ἀλλ' ὅλως οὐθὲν ὁφθῆσεται. Text from and translation adapted from the Loeb edition of Hett 2000: 106–107.

²⁵ Hagen 2008: 13–29.

²⁶ Seiter 2002: 23, 33–37; Carlé 2007: 31–59; Alloa 2009: 252–261; cf. Crawley 2016: 225–227.

²⁷ Kittler 2009: 25.

²⁸ Theophrastus (*Sens.* 50–55) appears to ascribe to Democritus the same position taken by Aristotle, rather than an opposing one. The Epicurean letter to Herodotus (Epicurus *Ep. Hdt.* 49) echoes Lucretius; cf. Macr. *Sat.* 7.14.1–23. For discussion of atomist theories of vision, see e.g. Burkert 1977; Furley 1993; O'Keefe 2010: 33–40; Rudolph 2011.

We should note, however, that Lucretius does not say that the images fly through the empty void, *vacuum quod inane vocamus* (Lucr. 1.439), but rather through the *auras*, the winds and airs that make up the atmosphere. Such airs may have been hard to grasp, but they existed. The atmosphere had a physical presence. Accordingly, although the Aristotelian and atomist positions would seem to contradict one another, the repercussions of either argument for the depiction of atmosphere may have been similar.

These kinds of writings provide a contextual framework for, but do not predetermine, the insistent play upon the duplicity of medium which is a feature of a wide range of Roman painting. It is fundamental to a number of largely monochromatic rooms painted in the late first century BCE, such as the walls of the rear alcove from *cubiculum* E of the Villa della Farnesina in Rome, which approximate the stage front of a theater building punctuated with representations of artworks ([Plate 8](#)).²⁹ On the right, the lowest portion of the painted wall shows a white dado decorated with a meander pattern; above the dado a thin ledge supports elaborate podia attached, in turn, to the socle of a narrow stage. Colonnets rise from the podia to support flower-like capitals and, in the next register, caryatids. Behind the stage we see a white backing wall, whose two registers are divided by a frieze and a cornice. In the center of the wall two substantial columns resting directly on the upper stage support the trabeated superstructure of an *aedicula*, enlivened by figural and decorative architectural sculpture. Above the backing wall is a plain white background, pictorially distinct from that wall only because it is pierced and interrupted at the left and right by curving colonnades.

Two full-length figures sit on the upper stage on either side of the central *aedicula*, identifiable as Selene on the left and Sol on the right. The figures are painted in lifelike colors, and they perform expressive gestures. Given the theatrical connotations of the composition, we might at first think that they are participants in a dramatic performance. But, as in Room 4 of the Villa of the Mysteries, because they stand on bases rather than directly on the stage itself, it seems more likely that they are statues. They are permanent, not ephemeral, features of the decorative scheme of this theater-like structure. Yet the direct conflation of statue base with the lifelike color of the figures deliberately muddles distinctions between living bodies and representational media.

²⁹ See especially Bragantini and De Vos 1982: 284–286; Moormann 1988: 235; Sanzi di Mino and Bragantini 1998: 94–113; Mols and Moormann 2008: 50.

Above all it is the use of the color white that blurs medial difference. White dominates the room. The very same shade serves, evidently, as the surface of the dado, stage, and backing wall, and as atmospheric medium in the zone above the backing wall, as well as both surface and atmosphere in the large central landscapes, both of which depict human figures at rustic shrines. The prevalence of the color plays up the indeterminacy between panel and prospect in these central paintings. It also distorts the overall sense of pictorial space in the room. Although some of the wall's architectural elements, such as the lower podia, seem to project forward into the space of the viewer, and others, such as the curved colonnades in the uppermost register, to recede backwards in space, the dominance of the color white and the multiple uses to which the shade is put give the composition as a whole an eerily space-less effect.³⁰ The lack of definite space also serves to emphasize that the painted architecture has been conceived primarily as a stage for the collection and display of fictive artworks.

At the Black Room of the Villa at Boscotrecase, this principle has been extended to its limit (Figure 4.3). Here a maroon dado supports a narrow green stage with delicate, highly attenuated colonnettes supporting a central *aedicula*, in the middle of which float small, gem-like villa landscapes. The rest of the room, however, seems to have been decorated in black. It occupies the area of the backing wall, the uppermost zone, and the field inside the central *aedicula*. The color here no longer serves any clear function at all – as either surface or atmosphere. While the central landscapes stand out brightly in front of the black, it is not at all clear that they are meant to be painted on a black material support, like stone, nor that they are intended to be seen through a dark, night-time atmosphere. The conceit of the architecture of the room is more or less the same as at the House of Livia or the Farnesina, but where those play on the ambiguity of figure and ground, especially with respect to the paintings of paintings, here the figure-ground relationship has become purely optical, and the

³⁰ A related phenomenon occurs in the paintings of the cryptoporticus (A) of the same villa, which display a colonnade of green columns against a white background, with a series of square, framed panel paintings hanging as though set into the backing wall. When viewed as the backdrop to those panels, the white is largely formless. It achieves the status of both material ground and atmospheric effect, however, when it in turn comes to serve as the direct ground for a set of landscapes, and one naval scene, which are painted as though directly on the backing wall, a point indicated by the fact that those scenes pass behind the columns. See e.g. Bragantini and De Vos 1981: 77–122; Sanzi di Mino and Bragantini 1998: 32–45; Mols and Moorman 2008: 53–58.



Figure 4.3 Black room, Villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscorecase, late first century BCE.

pervasiveness of a single color has, so to speak, totally dissolved the medium of representation.³¹

The dual logic of remediation is not limited to the ambiguity of such color fields on Roman walls; Roman muralists explored the duplicity of medium in a variety of other ways as well. Many of these medial games revolved around the depiction of the material supports for the representation of representation, which was often purposefully polyvalent. The center of a wall taken from the *Praedia* of Julia Felix in Pompeii (II.4.3), for example, features two figures, a silen and a maenad, floating against an orange background (Figure 4.4).³² A thin golden line creates a rectangle around them, evoking the kinds of frames for fictive panels discussed in the Chapter 2. Beyond that rectangle, however, the color field extends to points at the corners and the center of the sides, and curves in elsewhere to create a scalloped edge. A garland-like border, now heavily worn, once ran around its edge. The visual effect of this device is to evoke a piece of cloth that has been stretched and tacked to a wall in six spots, and which sags where it is not

³¹ Cf. Nodelman 1971; Bruno 1993.

³² *PPM* 3.184–310, esp. 289; Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: 372–373, no. 172, with bibliography.

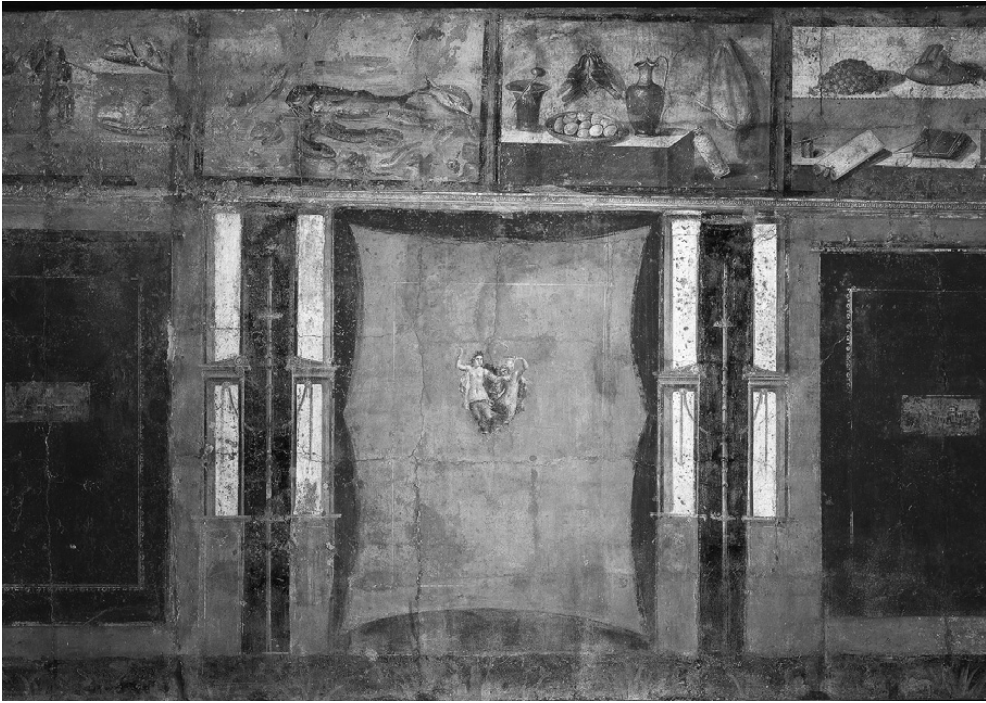


Figure 4.4 Tablinum 92, *Praedia* of Julia Felix, Pompeii (II.4.3), mid- to late first century CE.

directly affixed to its support. If this central field is meant to suggest a tapestry or other textile, we might wonder if the floating figures are embroidered or painted on it.³³ We cannot be certain, though it should be noted that the earliest example I know of with such floating figures is in the painted decoration of the Pyramid of Cestius (Figure 3.9). Those paintings, I suggested in Chapter 3, replaced the expensive Pergamene tapestries that Cestius had requested decorate his tomb. Is it also possible that their form directly mimicked such tapestries? Even if they did not, a substantial amount of evidence survives for two-dimensional decoration on cloth.³⁴ The ambiguity of material at the *Praedia* of Julia Felix, moreover, plays off the decoration of the upper zone of the wall, where discretely framed wooden panel paintings appear as though resting on the cornice. Within those panel paintings, moreover, are still further reflections on medium and material – a representation of ocean life in a watery environment; a still-life scene

³³ On such floating figures in Roman wall painting, see Valladares 2014; cf. Schwinzer 1979.

³⁴ E.g. Plin. *HN* 35.51; Jos. *BJ* 7.149; Ov. *Met.* 3.111–114, and discussion in Chapter 2. For further literary discussions of patterned and figured textiles see e.g. Jones 2016: 75–98.



Figure 4.5 *Cubiculum* 46, House of the Labyrinth. Pompeii (VI.11.10), mid-first century BCE.

with eggs, birds, silver vessels, and a hanging cloth; and a scene depicting coins and writing implements with a scroll and set of wax tablets.³⁵

The Julia Felix painting traverses the border between outright illusionistic depiction and the playfully ambiguous evocation of other media. This same border is explored in a Second Style painting from Room 46 of the House of the Labyrinth in Pompeii (VI.11.10), which purports to depict the typical architectural space of columns supporting a coffered ceiling in front of a backing wall (Figure 4.5).³⁶ On the left, that backing wall drops down to reveal an open portico and an expanse of blue sky. On top of the backing wall we see a rope supporting the top of a curtain, perhaps meant to evoke a theatrical curtain. Two birds perch on the rope, facing opposite directions and overlapping in an initially persuasive but ultimately physically impossible pose. The right part of the painting delights especially in the representation of colored and variegated marbles. Above the orthostats is a course of red, green, and yellow colored squares. These feature representations of figures executed in a kind of grisaille-like monochrome. Are

³⁵ For discussion of the framing techniques of still lives within Roman murals, see esp. Squire 2017; cf. 2009: 357–428.

³⁶ *PPM* 5.50–55; Strocka 1991: 50–52.

these figures meant to be reliefs?³⁷ Or are they directly painted onto the marble surfaces? Shading lends a sense of three-dimensionality to the figures, but it is not clear that they project out from the surface of the wall. Or, instead, are they evocations of the kinds of natural images that sometimes appear in variegated marble and which had occasionally appeared in First Style painting – figures which are not created by the human craftsman but only recognized from the random patterns of the geological process?³⁸

The ambiguity of monochrome appears once again in a late Second Style fresco removed from a villa near Portici and now in Naples (**Plate 9**).³⁹ Typical architectural elements appear in the scene, including a low dado, narrow stage, bright backing wall, and coffered ceiling. But there are unusual elements as well, especially a lotus column resting on the stage, and, set into the backing wall, a carefully framed green monochrome painting. Apparently a depiction of an embedded panel, this painting and its pendant from the same room are practically unique within the genre. Its restricted palette points toward the depiction of relief sculpture. But its execution is highly painterly, with bold highlights, quick and assured brushstrokes creating a sense of movement, cast shadows, and a layering of depth intervals that is not paralleled in contemporary relief sculpture. This ambiguity is highlighted by the treatment of shadows in the surrounding architecture. The basic conceit is that there is a light-source to the right of the painting, but the painted architectural elements only selectively cast shadows. Both framework and panel simultaneously suggest and deny their own medial status through the selective manipulation of illusionism and the deliberately duplicitous play between figure and ground.

Seeing-As and Seeing-In

If we turn once again to Aristotle, we find that he had also addressed the figure-ground relationship. In his treatise on the soul he articulated that cognition in general is image-based.⁴⁰ All thinking relies upon images. In his work on memory, Aristotle extended this point to assert that

³⁷ As Eric Moormann 1988: 36–39 has suggested of this type of painting.

³⁸ See discussion in Chapter 1.

³⁹ Moorman 1988: 226–227; Bragantini and Sampao 2009: 206–207, cat. no. 75, with bibliography.

⁴⁰ Aristotle, *De an.* 431a16, 432a8; Polansky 2008: 481–489, 497–500.

recollection entails the act of calling up previously experienced mental images in order to re-experience them.⁴¹ But in that act of calling up there is a kind of distancing: we do not typically experience memories as though we were re-living the actual event, but rather with a degree of remove that permits us to recognize them as memories. Aristotle asserts that this is so because such memories are representations, and in so doing he compares them to painted panels (*De Mem.* 450b21–24): “Just as a figure painted on a panel is both a figure and a likeness, and though one and the same, is both, yet the essence of the two is not the same, and it is possible to behold it as both a figure and a likeness.”⁴²

For Aristotle, a relation of likeness or similarity connects a memory to an original event, just as it connects a painting to its object of representation. But paintings and memories are not just likenesses. They are also independent, self-contained objects: figures. As a figure, the object painted on the panel exists as an independent material entity. As a likeness, it points toward something else.⁴³ Aristotle seems to suggest that the two aspects of a painting or a memory come into focus alternately rather than simultaneously, asserting that a memory is experienced as such when its independent existence as figure is not taken into account and it is only considered as an likeness, and not in and of itself.⁴⁴ But is this so? Are we capable of attending to a painting, or any other representation for that matter, only as a figure, or only as a likeness, at any given time? And what are the implications for this distinction for representations of representations?

The precise nature of the relationship between representation as figure and representation as likeness came to be a topic of reflection in the twentieth-century philosophy of perception, especially in relation to art. Ludwig Wittgenstein proposed a form of perception typically known as aspectual seeing, or seeing-as.⁴⁵ Wittgenstein seems to have meant by this the human capacity both to see representations as their objects of representation and to recognize particular aspects of a representation. Ernst Gombrich extended this argument to assert that we cannot simultaneously attend to the mechanics of a pictorial illusion and experience its effect: “I cannot make use of an illusion and watch it.”⁴⁶ The suggestion, here, is that we must make a choice when attending to the dual nature of pictures

⁴¹ Aristotle, *De mem.* 450a1–23. See e.g. Sorabji 1972; Annas 1995; Bloch 2007.

⁴² οἷον γὰρ τὸ ἐν τῷ πινάκι γεγραμμένον καὶ ζῶον ἐστὶ καὶ εἰκὼν, καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ ἐν τοῦτ’ ἐστὶν ἄμφορ, τὸ μέντοι εἶναι οὐ ταυτὸν ἀμφοῖν, καὶ ἔστι θεωρεῖν καὶ ὡς ζῶον καὶ ὡς εἰκόνα. Text from and translation adapted from the Loeb edition of Hett 2000: 294–297.

⁴³ Cf. Marin 1983; 1989. ⁴⁴ Arist. *De Mem.* 451a14: ὡς εἰκόνα καὶ μὴ ὡς καθ’ αὐτό.

⁴⁵ Wittgenstein 2001: 2.xi, 165–169. ⁴⁶ Gombrich 2000: 5–6.

identified by Aristotle; we cannot attend simultaneously to the picture's status as both figure and likeness.

In opposition to Gombrich's extension of seeing-as to the pictorial realm, Richard Wollheim coined the term seeing-in.⁴⁷ Wollheim asserted in a series of publications that seeing-as was neither specific to the perception of pictorial representation nor sufficient to fully describe what occurs during such perception.⁴⁸ Rather than the alternation of either/or, Wollheim argues, the perception of a representation has the quality of simultaneity, of both-and; he calls this the twofold thesis.⁴⁹ According to the twofold thesis, seeing-in involves simultaneously attending to the medium of representation, the physical material out of which a painting has been made, and to the object of representation, what is depicted in the painting.⁵⁰ It argues that we can perceive a painting as both solid surface and immaterial medium of representation at the same time, and thereby suggests that we are never truly taken in by art's illusions.

These issues are complicated by the multiplication of fictions inherent to the representation of representation. In paintings like those of the *tablinum* of the House of Livia, one sense of medium (white as atmosphere) depends upon the other (white as impermeable surface). The materiality of the fictive panel is a first-order fiction; the atmospheric conditions of that panel are a second-order fiction. What happens when we progress from one to the other? One of Wollheim's primary arguments was that seeing-as could not be limited to pictorial representation; it was simply an act of everyday perception. Anything can be seen-as; as a species of perception it does not imply fiction at all. But this may be precisely the point. Seeing the fictive panel as a panel actualizes it. The panel must be real – at least in the limited sense that it must notionally exist within its surroundings – before anything can happen within it. But it also calls its surroundings into question. The fictive panel both reifies the representational act and undermines the possibility of illusion through the instability of its materiality and the indeterminacy of its medium.

⁴⁷ Wollheim 1980: 209.

⁴⁸ Wollheim 1980; Savile and Wollheim 1986; Wollheim 1987: 43–100.

⁴⁹ Wollheim 1980: 212–216. For discussion of this thesis in light of ancient art, see e.g. Neer 2002: 36–54; Squire 2013c; Gensheimer 2015, and now especially Grethlein 2017: 149–262.

⁵⁰ “When seeing-in occurs, two things happen. I am visually aware of the surface I look at, and discern something standing out in front of, or (in certain cases) receding behind, something else.” Wollheim 1987: 46.

Immersive Ensembles

Roman meta-painting doubles and disrupts the illusion of its surroundings. It does so by existing notionally within a holistically conceived, immersive illusion, but at the same time offering a field of representation entirely distinct from that of its surroundings. Especially in the Second Style, the illusive technologies of the Roman mural guide us to look through the wall, but the remediation of the painting of painting reminds us of the impossibility of that desire. Yet it is also in the play of scale, material, and medium inherent to such remediation that the differences between means and modes of representation are put into creative dialogue, and that Roman murals are at their most aesthetically complex.

The primary technology of illusion available to Roman mural painters was immersion. By painting in unified decorative campaigns on each of the available walls of a given room, Roman muralists were able to place their viewers inside their fictions. They created holistically conceived environments that drew the viewer away from mundane domestic space and toward another realm. This simple point, often overlooked in specialist discussions of Roman wall painting, has been emphasized by the media theorist Oliver Grau.⁵¹ Immersion is “characterized by diminishing critical distance to what is shown and increasing emotional involvement in what is happening.”⁵² It acts to reduce a viewer’s ability to separate him- or herself from what is depicted by a given work: it embodies the immediacy that constitutes half of the double logic of remediation.⁵³

As Grau notes, the power of immersion is especially pronounced in painted spaces like the Room of the Mysteries in the Villa of the Mysteries (**Plate 2**), or the garden room from the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta (**Plate 10**), which shows a lush, flowering thicket replete with plants from

⁵¹ Although on the transformative immersive power of Roman murals, see the important discussions in e.g. Schefold 1952; Borbein 1975; Sauron 1994.

⁵² Grau 2003: 13.

⁵³ This is not to say that a mural would have legitimately fooled a Roman viewer into thinking that what it represented was a real entity in the world. Visible fictions inhabited Roman domestic architectural painting from its very beginnings. Bruno 1969 has argued that even the apparently straightforward plastered and painted masonry of First Style walls announces its fiction insofar as it does not conform to built architecture, and as Jaś Elsner has deftly elucidated, the Second Style is characterized by its ludic, even ironic alternation between opposites: physical and painted architecture, fictive and real materials, possible and impossible structures and spaces. Elsner 1994: 49–87; cf. e.g. Leach 2004: 85–92. But the ludic aspects of domestic painting do not necessarily abrogate the potential psychological power of immersive decorative ensembles.

throughout the Italian peninsula.⁵⁴ The garden painting almost fully dissolves the wall. Only in the lowest area of the socle do the picture plane and the physical plane of the wall coincide. Beyond that lies a carefully manicured garden setting and a low parapet wall, beyond which, in turn, is a profusion of birds, trees, and flowers depicted with botanical precision but, impossibly, in bloom simultaneously. The furthest depth interval is marked by a deep monochrome blue, which is evidently the blue of the sky, and which signals an indeterminate extension of space. Perhaps most significantly, the painted figures – animal and plant – are executed on a lifelike scale. If the fictive dissolution of the wall extends the lived space of the room out into the painted illusion, the scale of the figures brings that illusion back into inhabited space. The relationship between painting and living viewer becomes a potentially active one.

The medial games of meta-art interrupt this illusionism with startling force. On a wall recovered from the House of the Golden Bracelet in Pompeii (VI.17.42), for example, we find a garden painting in the mold of the Villa of Livia, with a variety of trees, flowers, birds, a deep blue background, and even a fountain with flowing water adding a sense of vibrancy and motion (**Plate 11**).⁵⁵ The wall is also punctuated by artifacts that play on their own medial status. In the foreground two herms rise to support painted panels. With simple beveled frames and pale color palettes, these panels seem to be made from marble, and we might think they are reliefs. But the shadows cast by their frames onto apparently flat surfaces, and the intimation of depth in space through painterly effect suggest otherwise. The heads of the herms supporting these panels further highlight the medial tensions within the mural.⁵⁶ Notionally, these must also be made from a durable medium, but pictorially they look more akin to paintings, executed with an extreme, lifelike realism, in a vibrant palette and by a gestural technique with pronounced highlights and shadows that strongly contrasts with the rest of the wall. That these heads are more lifelike than the bodies painted on the panels points to a deliberate gesture, one reinforced by the two masks hanging at the top of the wall. The one on the right is crowned with a still-green wreath, and both have deep auburn hair, as might real living beings. But the masks themselves are of a pale, alabaster white, more deeply blanched than the herms or the fountains, and

⁵⁴ See e.g. Kellum 1994; Settis 2002; Grau 2003: 25–31; Leach 2004: 123–132; Croisille 2005: 219–227; Spencer 2010: 155–161; Zarmakoupi 2008; Bergmann 2014; Jones 2016: 55–74.

⁵⁵ *PPM* 6.44–145, esp. 117–128; Moormann 1988: 202–203; Ciardiello 2006; Mattusch 2008: 172–173, no. 65; Bergmann 2014: esp. 264–266, 270–272.

⁵⁶ Cf. Stewart 2003: 40.

their faces, with eyes wide open and mouths gaping, are fixed in grotesque dramatic expressions that invert the sentient faces of the herms. The mural from the House of the Golden Bracelet explores not just the boundaries between opacity and transparency, nor just those among artistic media, but those between inert matter and living bodies.

The painted wall at the back of the garden of the House of the Marine Venus in Pompeii (II.3.3) pushes these inversions further (**Plate 12**).⁵⁷ Running the full length of the wall and framed by a low latticework fence and two tall yellow pillars, the painting promises to expand the actual space of the garden only to renege on that promise, in no small part through the juxtaposition of media. The foremost depth interval, in front of the fence, is taken up by a statue of Mars on the left, and a fountain on the right, both worked from shining white marble. On the flanks of the wall are garden views like those of the Villa at Prima Porta or the House of the Golden Bracelet. In the center, however, is a nude representation of Venus, reclining somewhat awkwardly on a conch shell floating on the sea and attended to by a cupid figure on the right and a boy riding a dolphin on the left. The composition of this central scene could not but have evoked the most famous painting of the ancient world, Apelles' *Aphrodite Anadyomene*, although it seems unlikely that it is a copy in any literal sense.⁵⁸ Both the pronounced red and white border running around this scene and its disjuncture from the flanks would indicate that it represents a representation, that it is a grandiosely scaled painting of a painting.⁵⁹ Are the flanking scenes then also paintings of paintings? Perhaps. They are framed by garlands, and their inherent fictions are signaled by theatrical masks hanging from the top of the frame. But they may also be prospects, or views onto another world that continues the garden. The birds point toward the miscibility of these two possibilities. Those that are inside the garden may be of difference species than those drinking from the fountain on the outside, which serve as part of the framing device. But what of the wading birds that perch on the fence between the two? To what order of reality do they belong? Do they mark a boundary, or rather indicate the interpenetrability of the two worlds? Once again both living bodies and mere media are put into direct dialogue and the nesting of fictions becomes difficult to disentangle.

⁵⁷ PPM 3.112–172, esp. 137–143; Moormann 1988: 159–160; Stewart 2003: 38–40; Hodske 2007: 151, cat. 102; Bergmann 2008: 65–67; Ciarallo 2012; De Carolis *et al.* 2012; Tammisto 2012.

⁵⁸ For Apelles' painting see e.g. Plin. *HN* 35.91; *DNO* nos. 2877–2897.

⁵⁹ Cf. Bergmann 2008: 65–67.

Roman Perspectives: From Immersion to Illusion

Garden paintings are a relatively small branch of Roman mural production; architectural paintings make up by far the more substantial category. In such architectural ensembles we encounter the other primary technology of illusion available to the Roman wall painter in the first century BCE – the perspectival construction, which, through the convergence of orthogonal lines toward a specific area of the wall, gives the impression that the objects depicted in the mural enjoy a consistent and comprehensible spatial relationship both to each other and to the viewer of the painting. Perspective constructions create the illusion of three-dimensional bodies located in space. The effect of these constructions is especially clear in cases like the views into sanctuaries on the wings of the Boscoreale *cubiculum* (Plate 1). Here the recession of orthogonal lines from the broken architrave and the projections of the podium on which the fluted yellow columns stand draw the eye into the center of the wall and toward the *tholos* shrine set behind this initial depth interval. The converging lines of the colonnades surrounding the *tholos*, in turn, frame it within a comprehensible space and help indicate where it might stand in relation to the picture plane and, ultimately, to the viewer.

These convergences are not precise. Ancient painters do not appear to have used the strict, mathematically derived, one-point perspective known in the Renaissance, but they did employ kinds of perspectival constructions.⁶⁰ The purpose of these constructions seems to have been to help dissolve the material plane of the wall and to draw the viewer to look onto a fictive space beyond the physical confines of the room. In creating and staging prospects for the inhabitants of a room, Roman mural perspectival constructions mirrored the practices of Roman domestic architecture, as Heinrich Drerup demonstrated in 1959.⁶¹ Drerup connected the deliberate framing of views and vistas in the Roman house, especially on the axis leading from the entrance through the *fauces* and *atrium* to the *tablinum* and beyond, with social practices such as the daily reception of clients by the patron of the house in the *tablinum*, religious

⁶⁰ For major studies of ancient perspective, see e.g.: Little 1956; 1971; White 1956; Blanckenhagen 1957; 1963; 1968; Blanckenhagen and Alexander 1990: 40–49; Richter 1970; Tybout 1989b: 187–214; Rouveret 1989: 65–128; Ehrhardt 1991; Panofsky 1991; Summers 2003: 431–499; Gros 2008; La Rocca 2008b; Stinson 2011; Sinisgalli 2012; Pierattini 2012; Hinterhöller-Klein 2015. Cf. Damisch 2000; Harries 2002; Belting 2011b.

⁶¹ Drerup 1959; Corlaita Scagliarini 1974; Jung 1984; Clarke 1991: 14–19; Bek 1993; Elsner 1995: 62–85, citing especially Vit. *De arch.* 6.2; Quint. *Inst. Orat.* 11.2.18–20; Plin. *Ep.* 2.17; 5.6. Cf. Borbein 1975.

rites such as the division of the sky in the practice of augury – the divining of the future through the flights of birds – and the aesthetic pleasure offered by views onto nature. Roman domestic architecture encouraged the viewer to look through it wherever possible; according to Drerup the views it offered had the quality of images (*Bildhaftigkeit*).⁶² Perspectival painting merely extends this tendency of built architecture into the realm of the virtual.

The study of ancient perspective is beset by a number of complicating factors, however. One is terminological. We have few surviving discussions of either the optical or the notational theories involved in producing perspective constructions. Lucretius seems to discuss the phenomenon of diminution as objects recede in space, and perhaps of the apparent convergence of parallel lines, in the experience of looking down a colonnade (4.426–431). But the representation of those visual phenomena in two dimensions adds another layer of complexity. In his treatise on architecture, Vitruvius asserts that one of the notational tools available to architects is *scaenographia*, literally “scene-painting.”⁶³ He says of it (*De arch.* 1.2.2) that: “likewise *scaenographia* is the chiaroscuro drawing of the front and the receding sides, and the correspondence of all lines to the center of a circle.”⁶⁴ Although the second part of Vitruvius’ definition has vexed modern interpreters, who have as yet produced no common opinion,⁶⁵ the “chiaroscuro drawing of the front and receding sides” has been interpreted as a kind of perspective, especially considering that the other notational tools of the architect were *ichnographia*, the drawing of plans, and *orthographia*, the drawing of elevations (*De arch.* 1.2.2). A later passage expands on the issue (Vit. *De arch.* 7.praef.11):

For first, in Athens, when Aeschylus was presenting a tragedy, Agatharchus made the scenery, about which he left behind a commentary. Informed by him, Democritus and Anaxagoras wrote about the same thing: how it should be that, with a fixed central place established, the lines correspond by natural law to the

⁶² Drerup 1959: 159.

⁶³ The modern bibliography is vast. For commentary on ancient sources on *scaenographia*, see especially *RE* s.v. *skene*; Arias in *EAA* VII, s.v. *scenografia*; Pollitt 1974: 236–247; Tybout 1989a; Koch 2000: 83–91; Small 2013.

⁶⁴ *Item scaenographia est frontis et laterum abscedentium adumbratio ad circinique centrum omnium linearum responsus*. Text Fleury 2003: 15. Translation adapted from Stinson 2011: 406.

⁶⁵ Recently, Stinson 2011: 406 renders *responsus* as “convergence.” He interprets this to mean that the orthogonal lines of a scenographic painting should converge in a general area (*ad centrum circini*), rather than at a single point, as in Renaissance linear perspective. White and Pollitt likewise read *responsus* as convergence but posit that *centrum circini* may mean a single point, rather than a general area. See: White 1956: 46–51; Pollitt 1974: 241.

sight of the eyes and the extension of their rays, so that from an uncertain object certain images may render the appearance of buildings in the paintings of the stages, and things which are drawn upon vertical and plane surfaces may seem in one case to be receding, and in another to be projecting.⁶⁶

As a mode of accurately rendering the visible world in two dimensions, which bridges the theoretical and practical, *scaenographia* serves an important function for Vitruvius.⁶⁷ His descriptions of its actual production have proved difficult to unpack, however. Panofsky proposed that Vitruvius describes the conversion of a curved retinal image onto a flat surface.⁶⁸ The result, he argued, was that unlike Renaissance one-point perspective, in which all orthogonals on a given surface resolve onto a single point, the orthogonals of ancient perspective resolved onto a central axis, creating a fishbone effect. Though this created a less coherent image than Renaissance perspective, it was truer to optical experience, with the significant caveat that what such a construction reproduced was not an external but an internal image. Panofsky's interpretation has not been universally accepted, however, and scholars have ranged from asserting that Vitruvius consolidates, in however muddled a fashion, a body of theoretical knowledge corresponding to perspective,⁶⁹ to the position that little to no complex theory at all lay behind Vitruvius' idea of *scaenographia*.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *namque primum Agatharchus Athenis, Aeschylo docente tragoediam, [ad] scaenem fecit et de ea commentarium reliquit. Ex eo moniti Democritus et Anaxagoras de eadem re scripserunt, quemadmodum oporteat ad aciem oculorum radiorumque extentionem certo loco centro constituto lineas ratione naturali respondere, uti de incerta re certae imagines aedificiorum in scaenarum picturis redderent speciem et, quae in directis planisque frontibus sint figurata, alia abscedentia, alia prominentia esse videantur.* Text Cam 2003: 5–7; Translation adapted from White 1987: 251; cf. Stinson 2011: 406.

⁶⁷ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill asserts that theory, in Vitruvius *ratio*, is a necessary complement to custom, or *consuetudo*, in order to produce *auctoritas*, authoritative influence (Vit. *De arch.* 1.1.1). See Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 159–160; cf. Tanner 2006: 160–182. See on ancient optics more generally Squire and Netz 2016.

⁶⁸ Panofsky 1991: 37–45; cf. Wood 1991: 22; Tanner 2016: 108–109.

⁶⁹ E.g. White 1956; Stinson 2011; Sinisgalli 2012.

⁷⁰ Jocelyn Penny Small succinctly states: “Skenographia is simply a technique to render buildings (and objects) in oblique views.” Small 2013: 128; cf. Gros 2008. The interpretation is further complicated by the fact that Vitruvius claims that the technique of *scaenographia* was invented in Classical Greece, but little physical evidence for it survives before the late fourth century, when scenographic techniques appear both in Apulian vase painting and Macedonian tomb painting. The most commonly cited example of the former is the so-called Würzburg scenography, a fragment of a painted vase depicting the performance of a play on a stage building seen from an oblique view. See e.g. Sinn and Wehgartner 2001: 116, no. 51; Taplin 2007: 228, no. 88. For the latter, see especially Miller 1993.

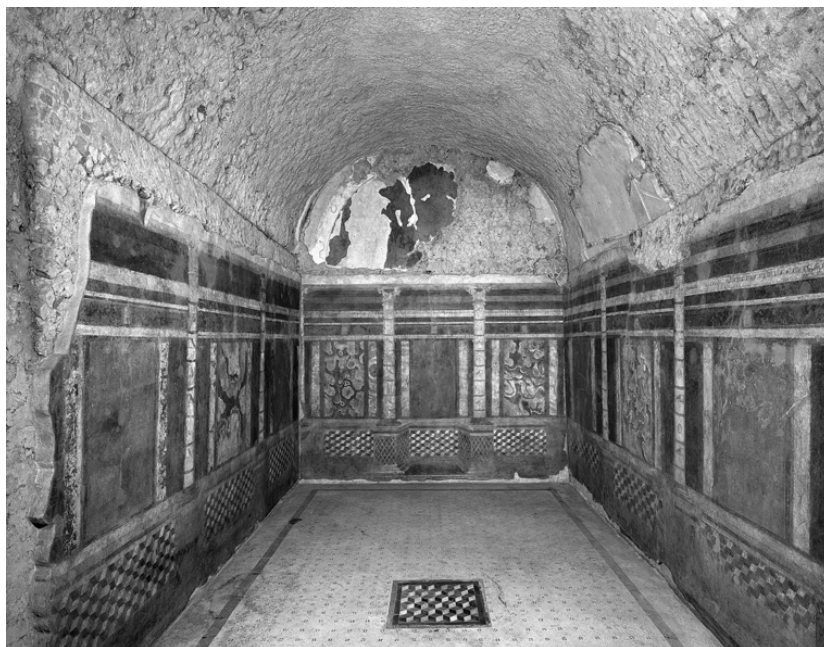


Figure 4.6 Room 2, House of the Griffins. Rome, Palatine Hill, early first century BCE.

Beyond such textual sources, scholars have been able to adduce a great deal of evidence for perspective-like constructions in Roman painting. These constructions share the common goal of depicting depth in space on a flat surface through the recession of orthogonal lines. These lines never meet at a single point, but they may meet at a central line or within a general area. Three primary forms of perspectival construction have been identified on first-century walls. The first, known commonly as asymmetrical perspective, appears largely in early Second Style rooms, such as Room 2 of the House of the Griffins (Figure 4.6).⁷¹ Here, the orthogonals of all three painted walls resolve toward the center of the rear wall of the room. Josef Engemann proposed that the decorative scheme could be understood as a single continuous facade that had been folded onto three walls.⁷² In this formulation, asymmetrical perspective is an aspect of immersion; it determines an ideal viewing point for an entire room. But it could also be deployed as a way to connect the painted architecture inside a room with the built architecture outside it.⁷³ That is, a viewer would be led both to look

⁷¹ Rizzo 1936c: 9–13.

⁷² Engemann 1967: 67, no. 280; cf. Corlaita Scagliarini 1974; Clarke 1991: 42–45.

⁷³ Wesenberg 1968: 102–109.



Figure 4.7 Room 23, Villa A (Poppea) at Oplontis, mid-first century BCE.

toward the back wall and to turn around to look outside the room itself. Asymmetrical perspective rewards both static viewers and those in motion.

In the later Second Style, asymmetrical systems are exchanged for perspectival constructions in which each wall, or even each section of a wall, was composed as a discrete entity. Philipp Stinson has identified two forms of perspective in these paintings: what he terms convergence perspective, in which orthogonal lines converge toward a single area such as in Room 23 of Villa A at Oplontis (Figure 4.7); and parallel perspective, in which the orthogonals do not converge, but recede in parallel toward a central line.⁷⁴ Parallel perspective occurs most frequently in the lower section of Second Style walls, whereas convergence perspective occurs in the upper and middle zones. In some cases, multiple areas of convergence may be identified. Stinson hypothesizes that the dimensions of the wall may have influenced the kind of perspective with which it was decorated; extreme distortions and foreshortening were generally avoided and some walls were unsuited to a single convergence system.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Stinson 2011: 403; cf. Clarke 1991: 113–123; 2014; Fergola and Guzzo 2000; Leach 2004: 75–85; Clarke and Gazda 2016.

⁷⁵ Stinson 2011: 420.

Scene Painting and Theatrical Effects

Ultimately, each of these perspective systems would have served the same primary purpose: to create the impression of lifelikeness, to draw the viewer's gaze through the surface of the wall into a fictive world lying behind it, and to blur the distinction between reality and fiction. And yet, the immersive aspects of perspective systems stood in tension with the architectural forms depicted therein. Like a number of first-century murals, the painting from Oplontis, with its narrow stage, projecting architecture, and tripartite structure, seems to evoke a theatrical building. No permanent theaters were built in Rome prior to the Theater of Pompey in 55 BCE, and even early Imperial theater buildings are relatively scarce, but the extant evidence indicates that just this aesthetic of projection and recession, and especially the tripartite ordering of the building, were hallmarks of theatrical architecture.⁷⁶ The frescoes in Room 23 of the villa at Oplontis may represent temporary stage buildings, constructed from painted wood and other ephemeral materials, such as were built each year in Rome for the *ludi scaenici* during the Republic.⁷⁷

The purpose of such a building, in the social life of Rome, was to serve as a frame for fiction. It provided a physical space for actors to perform tragedy, comedy, or the extremely popular mimes, but it was also a kind of liminal social space where alternate realities came to life, however briefly, and under tightly controlled circumstances. Where the system of representation heralded by the flowering of perspective painting in the mid-first century BCE sought to draw the viewer through the wall and into a transcendent space beyond the confines of lived reality, the objects of representation resisted by asserting their own presentational nature. Perspectival depictions of architecture guided the viewer to look through the wall, but that architecture, in turn, offered itself and that which it

⁷⁶ Evidence for what ancient theaters looked like is collected in e.g. Bieber 1920; 1939; Beacham 1979; Fuchs 1987; Beacham 1995; Denard and Beacham 2003; Sear 2006; Manuwald 2011.

Gilles Sauron has argued that mid-Second Style paintings may actually mimic the *proskenion* of the Greek Hellenistic theater building – normally understood as a colonnade set on a stage, with painted wooden boards fitted into the intercolumniations and providing the backdrop to the play's action. Sauron 1994: 540–541. Cf. Moretti 1997; 2009.

⁷⁷ Leach 2004: 93–122. Such temporary theaters, moreover, could be remarkably ornate. Marcus Scaurus' theater structure of 58 BCE featured 360 marble columns (Plin. *HN* 36.5–6) and 3000 statues (Plin. *HN* 34.36); it was built in three stories and further decorated with gold-thread Attalid tapestries and painted panels (Plin. *HN* 36.113–115). Sauron suggests that the dedication of the Theater of Pompey, in particular, had a discernible effect on the appearance of Roman wall painting in the mid-first century, Sauron 1994: 460–461, but it is striking how often these paintings seem to refer to temporary structures.

framed out to the viewer. A dialectic arose between the Roman muralists' techniques and objects of representation that alternately pulled the viewer into, and pushed her or him out of, the picture. This dialectic was not necessarily related to the painting of painting, but it prepared the viewer for meta-pictorial acts of doubling and disruption, and insofar as these presentational architectural forms frame the fictive panel, they clarify its role within the larger system of Roman wall painting as both material object and bearer of content in its own right.

Vitruvius helps to establish the connection between the techniques and objects of representation of Roman domestic painting. In the first book of his treatise on architecture he had asserted that "scene-painting," *scaenographia*, a kind of perspectival rendering of architectural forms, was one of the primary notational and design tools of the ancient architect (*De arch.* 1.2.2). In the preface to the seventh book he writes that the invention of such scene-painting was directly related to the decoration of theatrical sets; perspectival drawing was first employed by Agatharchus of Samos when he painted a stage for a play by Aeschylus.⁷⁸

As a genre, scene painting was said to have been imported into Rome during the consulship of Appius Claudius Pulcher, in 99 BCE (Val. Max. 2.4.6), and it enjoyed a public character. According to Pliny (*HN* 35.113), supposedly quoting Varro, a painter named Serapio (perhaps from Alexandria) had exhibited a large panel along a balustrade in the old shops of the Roman Forum. This painter, Pliny asserts, had excelled in painting stages or scenes, *scaenas*, but was incapable of depicting the human figure. This distinction would seem in important ways to mirror Second Style painting, where the representation of architecture dominates but the human figure rarely appears. Vitruvius links *scaenographia* with the decoration of the Roman house in his discussion of appropriate themes for domestic wall painting, where he chooses a painting of a small theater, as a corroborative example (*De arch.* 7.5.5–7). He also asserts that Roman muralists had been accustomed to paint genres associated with stage decorations in certain domestic contexts (*De arch.* 7.5.2). In a remarkable overlap, the technique of scene painting – that is, the illusionism of perspective – was deployed for the representation of the scene. This statement would be merely tautological were the context of these paintings not domestic; the theatrical has been brought into the realm of everyday life.

⁷⁸ Vit. *De arch.* 7.praef.11; cf. 5.6.8–9; 7.5.5–7; *DNO* nos. 1620–1635.

To understand the historically specific appeal of this kind of domestic decoration, we must keep in mind just how important dramatic literature and theatrical performances had been in Republican Rome. Like its Athenian counterpart, Roman drama was a religious phenomenon. From their inception, dramatic performances, the *ludi scaenici*, had been associated with some of the most important religious festivals in the city.⁷⁹ Although the origin of these performances supposedly stretched back to the mid-fourth century, according to later tradition it was only in 240 BCE that serious dramaturgy was introduced.⁸⁰ The invention of Roman drama was also closely tied, at least from the point of view of the first century BCE, to the development of an independent national literature. Livius Andronicus and his successors, including Naevius, Ennius, Plautus, and Terence, were enshrined in the canon of early Latin literature. This canon was condensed and formalized during the late Republic and early Principate.⁸¹ But Livius had evidently closely adopted his plays from Greek models, and the precise Romanness of early dramatic texts was in debate even in antiquity.⁸² Catherine Edwards has emphasized the ambivalence with which the Roman aristocracy viewed drama and the theater; although the *ludi scaenici* were an important part of the duties of the *aediles*, many aspects of the theater, especially the actors themselves, were denigrated in elite literature.⁸³

What precisely that meant in the context of domestic decoration is still not fully understood. Scholars have suggested that theatrical references in Roman paintings might respond relatively closely to the importance of real theaters as *loci* of the display of wealth and power, and as instruments of social control;⁸⁴ that they might have marked out a liminal, fictional mode of representation by staging the house as a place of theatricality, and thereby heightened the dramatic quality of the inhabitants' self-fashioning through domestic decoration.⁸⁵ This latter interpretation, it

⁷⁹ See especially Livy 7.2; Val. Max. 2.4.4. See e.g. Conte 1994: 13–67; Manuwald 2011: 30–40.

⁸⁰ Cic. *Brut.* 72; *Tusc.* 1.3; *Sen.* 50; Liv. 7.2.8–10. Cf. Gruen 1992: 80–82; Conte 1994: 30–31; Goldberg 2005: 1–19; Manuwald 2011: 34–36.

⁸¹ Goldberg 2005; cf. Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 153–169; Feeney 2016.

⁸² On the debate surrounding which, and its significance for later literary history, see esp. Goldberg 2005: 1–19, 204–211.

⁸³ Edwards 1993: 98–136. This ambivalence is reflected, perhaps, in the ban on permanent theater buildings in the city of Rome until the mid-first century BCE, though a number of other explanations have been proposed for the ban as well, including the suggestion that the yearly erection of increasingly elaborate temporary stage buildings became an important part of the interplay of competing aristocratic interests in the late Republic. For other possible interpretations of the ban see Leach 2004: 100–102; Manuwald 2011: 55–68.

⁸⁴ Axer 1991: 221; Leach 2004: 100. ⁸⁵ Wiseman 1987; Rouveret 2002: 113; Leach 2004: 104.

seems, is closely connected to a philosophical attitude in which life itself is conceived of as a role to be acted out.⁸⁶

This presentational role of the theater seems to be a particularly important aspect of its function as a framing device. The notational technique of *scaenographia* draws the viewer into a fictional world, but the thematic of the theater is to push back, to announce its own fiction. This is why, perhaps, stage buildings comparatively rarely feature in South Italian vase painting, even when such vases represent scenes from specific plays. To draw attention to the staged-ness of the scene would be to detract from its narrative force. But in the context of the Roman house this push and pull of fiction was evidently desired. That the theatrical play of fiction was directly tied to material, medial, and optical ambiguities inherent in the painting of painting is evident in any number of examples, such as, for instance, the lower *cubiculum* of the House of Augustus (Figure 3.2), where the overall composition of the room evokes a simple stage-front scheme. On the left-hand wall of the room we observe a tall, rectangular scene of a city street populated by figures bounded by, on one side, the corner of the room, and on the other, a pier set on a projecting podium (Figure 4.8). This scene, which is mirrored on the right-hand wall of the room, lacks a clear framing device like the central *aedicula* of the back wall, and initially gives the impression that it is a prospect, a view through the wall into a world beyond. As in the *tablinum* of the House of Livia, however, I would suggest that it may correspond to the part of the stage building Vitruvius calls a *periaktos* (*De arch.* 5.6.8), a three-sided machine decorated with paintings meant to set the scene occurring on stage. These could be rotated, and the scene changed, according to the needs of a given play. Vitruvius notes that the *periaktoi* sit toward the edges of the stage building. The decorative program of the room as a whole evokes a stage building, albeit one folded across several walls.

If these scenes do depict *periaktoi*, then they are not prospects, but rather yet another facet of the painting of painting. Alternatively, both the city scenes on the flanking walls and the scene on the rear wall may take the place of the three doors of Vitruvius' stage building (*De arch.* 5.6.3), the central royal door, or *porta regia*, and the two flanking doors for guests, the *hospitalia*. This possibility is recommended by the fact that all three figural scenes appear to have steps leading up to them from the stage. In either instance it is clear that the painters responsible for the room delighted in

⁸⁶ Allroggen-Bedel 1974: 68–73; Sauron 1994: 374–380; Galinsky 1996: 188. For further links between the representation of the stage and religious and philosophical beliefs, see e.g. Schefold 1952; 1972; Borbein 1975; Rouveret 1989: 68–74; Grüner 2004: 97–110; cf. Sauron 2001: 769–786; 2007: 45–66.



Figure 4.8 Detail, Lower *Cubiculum*, House of Augustus, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE.

the play of medium and especially in manipulating conventions of illusion. The projecting podium and pier of the left-hand wall, for instance, appear to cast a shadow onto the stage and the steps leading up to the city scene, yet that shadow is not evident on the scene itself, as we might expect if it were meant to represent a flat, opaque surface. This is not to say that the

scene must really be a prospect, rather than a panel, but that the painters have deliberately played upon our expectations. The theatrical setting both literally and figuratively frames the viewer's experience of the painting of painting.

Sacred Evocations

But paintings like these were not mere transpositions of the stage building of a theater. They were productive adaptations of the stage-front strategy. Foremost among their adaptive devices is a large central *aedicula*, with projecting entablature supported by columns, as in a painting recovered from a house with a library in Pompeii (VI.17.41).⁸⁷ Here we find the familiar projecting and receding dado, narrow stage, and tripartite building, although with the variety of openings in the dado apparently showing aquatic scenes with ducks and with a narrow space depicted to the right side of the stage building with a fountain and arcuated windows opening on to trees (Plate 13). The central *aedicula* is supported by two richly variegated marble columns; it projects over an embedded panel depicting a scene of devotees at a temple. These *aediculae* may relate in some respect to the royal doors of stage fronts, but they differ from stage buildings in crucial ways.⁸⁸ They are discrete, self-contained units, rather than inscribed *fornices*, or the projecting central elements of earlier imitations of stage buildings at Oplontis, which form a continuous whole with their surroundings. Most significantly, however, these central *aediculae* frame their fictive paintings in such a clear and unambiguous way – without casting shadows or obscuring the borders of the panels – that it seems clear that the act of framing is their primary purpose. Unlike the royal door, the central *aedicula* neither provides nor denies a view through itself into a space outside the fiction of the stage. Rather, it provides a view *onto* – it opens onto a second plane of representation, in which fictive panels display landscapes, idylls, sanctuaries, and scenes of myth.

The presentational function of the *aedicula* or *naiskos*, the shrine or little temple, had a long history, which helps elucidate the role it played on Roman walls. In the built environment, one of the purposes of such structures was to house precious objects; when the *naiskos/aedicula* type was represented in sculpture or painting, it demonstrated that whatever it

⁸⁷ PPM 6.10–43, esp. 36; Moormann 1988: 203–204; Strocka 1993; de Simone 2006; Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: 202–203, no. 72.

⁸⁸ See e.g. Tybout 1989b: 212; cf. Leach 2004: 134–135.

framed was worthy of display.⁸⁹ This function may have ultimately derived from Egyptian prototypes. Small aedicular structures housed cult statues in the innermost rooms of Egyptian temples. Figures known as *naophoroi* – kneeling men and women who hold out such small shrines containing deities – were common into the late period.⁹⁰ Perhaps the best-known Greek representations of *naiskoi* occur on Attic gravestones of the Classical period. Among the earliest of such stelai is the grave monument of Hegeso, a late fifth-century stele depicting the deceased seated and an attendant standing (Figure 4.9).⁹¹ Two Doric pilasters supporting a pediment crowned with palmettes frame the human figures. These framing elements both connect the activity occurring on the stele to temple architecture – and thus to the sacred – and cut off that activity from the surrounding world.⁹² We may note how carefully composed the object is: Hegeso’s chair and the foot and himation of the attendant both exceed the boundaries of the aedicular frame. But the body of Hegeso is clearly within it. This point is especially emphasized by the fact that she does not lean all the way back against her chair, and there is a clear gap between her back and the frame proper. The *naiskos* both displays and contains its true object of presentation: the body of the deceased.⁹³

Representations of *naiskoi* as tombs are also frequent in fourth-century South Italian vase paintings.⁹⁴ In an early example by the Iliupersis Painter, now in the British Museum, a statue of a youth, nude except for a chlamys, leans on a fountain inside a small shrine (Figure 4.10).⁹⁵ The *naiskos*, once again, is a grave monument, and the figure inside it, accordingly, a statue of the deceased, a point made especially clear by the deliberate use of the color white. The *naiskos* form appears both in the built architecture of Hellenistic Alexandrian tombs and as the form for Alexandrian painted grave markers.⁹⁶

⁸⁹ See now especially Platt and Squire 2017a: 261–265; Gaifman 2017, esp. 408–423.

⁹⁰ Numerous examples have survived, some of which seem to have been known in the Roman period. For the Vatican *naophoros*, which depicts a sixth-century BCE Egyptian official and may have been recovered from the Villa of Hadrian at Tivoli, see e.g. Lloyd 1982; cf. Bonnet 1961. For the so-called Farnese Naophoros in Naples, also likely produced in the sixth century BCE, Lo Sardo 2008: 16.

⁹¹ Athens NMA 3624. See e.g. Thimme 1964; Stewart 1990: 92, 172, fig. 477; Clairmont 1993: 95; Leader 1997; Closterman 2007; Platt and Squire 2017b: 71–72.

⁹² On framing devices in Greek art see especially Hurwit 1977.

⁹³ On the dynamic between this function and that of sixth-century grave markers such as *kouroi* and *korai*, see Neer 2010; cf. Stears 2000.

⁹⁴ Lohmann 1979; Trendall 1989: 70; 266–267; Söldner 2009.

⁹⁵ British Museum F 283 (1849,0518.4). See e.g. Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978: 185–203; 1982: 482–522.

⁹⁶ In built architecture in Alexandria, note in particular Anfushy Tombs II and IV; Venit 2002: 73–74, 88–89. For Alexandrian limestone grave markers worked into the shape of *naiskoi*, with

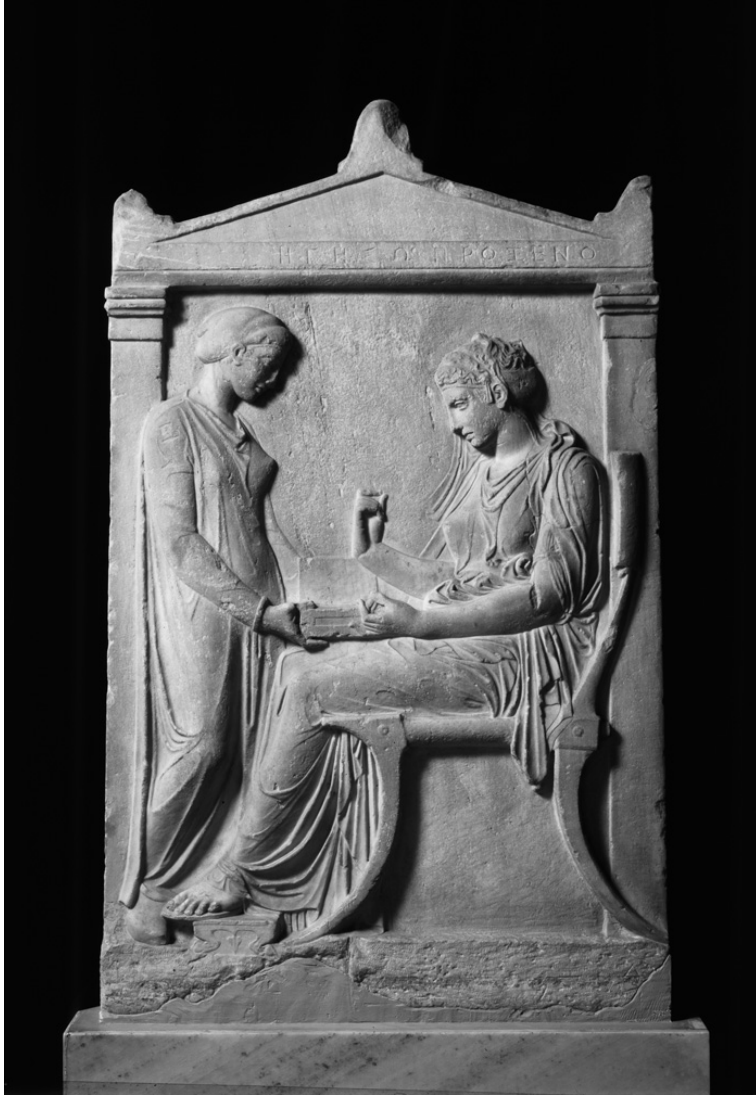


Figure 4.9 Stele of Hegeso, late fifth century BCE.

But the form is not only funerary. Aedicular structures frame representations of representations throughout Roman coinage.⁹⁷ They protect the paintings

paintings set into reserved panels, see e.g. a late fourth or early third-century tomb stele showing a seated man clasping hands with a standing woman (New York Metropolitan Museum of Art 14.17.2), or the *loculus* slab for the tomb of Pelopides (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 14.17.3), dated to the second half of the third century BCE.

⁹⁷ For an early example see e.g. the *as* of L. Rubrius Dossenus, struck in 87 BCE, though this may represent a *rostrum* placed inside an *aedicula* rather than a statue; British Museum 1931.4.8.4.



Figure 4.10 Apulian Red-Figure Volute Krater, attributed the Iliupersis Painter, mid-fourth century BCE.

depicting household gods in *lararia* throughout Pompeii, and a number of wooden *aediculae* have been recovered from houses in Herculaneum.⁹⁸ Built *aediculae* may even have housed actual panel paintings during the Republic. When Lucilius speaks of a *pergula pictorum*, he may mean a projecting structure with a painting hung in it, something like an

Crawford 1974: 362–363, 348/6; Pl. XLVI.3. For a clear example of the *imago clipeata* inside an *aedicula*, see: the *denarius* of M. Antonius, struck in 42 BCE; Crawford 1974: 512, 496/2, Pl. LX/16.

⁹⁸ For *lararia* see Fröhlich 1991. Similar structures for housing the *Lares* are called *aediculae* by Petronius (2.29). For wooden *aediculae*, see esp. Mols 1999: 132–134.

aedicula.⁹⁹ A passage from the juridical writings in the *Digest* speaks of a painter exposing (*expositam*) a panel or a shield inside a *pergula*, seemingly indicating that the term indicated not just a workshop or storage space but explicitly a site of display (9.3.5.2).

When the late Republican orator Hortensius purchased a painting of the Argonauts by Kydias, he had a special shrine, an *aedes*, constructed just to house it.¹⁰⁰ We find here an extreme extension of the logic of the *naiskos*. On the Attic funerary stele the form of the frame both evoked sacred architecture and reversed its function. It highlighted that the object depicted within the frame – the body of the deceased – had been excised from the everyday world, but instead of concealing that body from view it permanently displayed it. But the sacrality of the object of display, and the concurrent inviolability of the actual interred body, were never in doubt. They were merely reinforced by the stele. In Pliny's anecdote, however, Hortensius appears to have enshrined not the object of representation – the Argonauts – but rather the representing object – Kydias' painting. He displaced it from the quotidian world of production and consumption, took it out of time, and made it into an object of collection.

The tensions inherent to the aedicular form between protection and presentation appear with particular clarity in the painting from the house with a library in Pompeii (VI.17.41). The central fictive panel is unusual in the importance it gives to architecture, and is particularly noteworthy for the relatively believable scale of that architecture, especially the central *tholos* with its gilded statue, in relation to the two human figures in the foreground (Plate 13). But this mimeticism is immediately disrupted by the gifts that the two figures seem to be offering – two pieces of fruit, but executed on a huge scale, almost half the size of their bodies. Can these possibly be meant to represent real pieces of fruit? If so they would dramatically call into question the reality of the world depicted on the panel. And if the tragic masks resting on the backing wall on either side of the central *aedicula* are to scale, as they are so often in Second Style painting, what of the birds and fish hanging below them? They are also far too big. Are these just representations, painted on the stage building, or rather grotesquely large animals? There appears to be a ribbon along the beaks of the birds, indicating they are tied if not exactly hanging. And how

⁹⁹ Lucil. 484–489M, quoted in Lact. *Div. inst.* 1.22.13. Given the parallel use of the term in Pliny (*HN* 35.83), where he writes that Apelles would occasionally place his paintings in a *pergula* and listen to the comments of passers-by, the term may specifically indicate a site of display. See also Rouveret 1989: 381–382.

¹⁰⁰ Plin. *HN* 35.130; *DNO* no. 2838; cf. Hallett 2015: 16–17.

does all of this fit into the broader framework, with fountains, views into cypress trees, and ducks visible through arches below? Expectations of coherence are thwarted at every turn.

Although the fictive panel is ringed with a border, demarcated and set off as distinct within the painting's fiction, it is ultimately no more or less medially coherent than any other element of that fiction. In this example, the basic paradoxes of embedding one mode of representation within another seem to be taken to their furthest extreme. The immersive and perspectival illusions of Roman murals sought to draw the viewer through the wall, out beyond the confines of a domestic room and into an alternate world rich with religious, royal, and theatrical allusions. But just where the perspectival tricks of that architecture would guide us to look deep into a fictional world, we find a new plane of representation, and we are brought right back out to the material plane of the painting, right to the very surface where the artist applied his brush. The remarkable manipulation of scale across the wall only highlights the inescapability of surface.

Mirrorings

I close the chapter, finally, with one further aspect of medium and mediation on Roman walls. Beyond the play of transparency and opacity, surface and depth, we find a fascination with reflections and mirrors. These devices, at times natural, at others manufactured, seem to supply a mode of visual representation which is simultaneously trustworthy and fickle, and which offers a model for philosophical and poetic thinking about artistic representation.¹⁰¹ The reflective surface appears across a variety of Roman meta-paintings, enacting a game of gazes that threatens even to erupt from the boundaries of the painted surface. In a painting of Thetis receiving the arms of Achilles from Hephaistos, a central panel from a Fourth Style wall since removed from Pompeii to Naples, the act of mirroring deliberately plays upon the limits of artistic representation (Figure 4.11).¹⁰² In the Homeric account of this passage (Hom. *Il.* 18. 478–609), the shield of Achilles serves a supremely important role as the product of divine craftsmanship.¹⁰³ In the first extended and most

¹⁰¹ See e.g. Balensiefen 1990; Hales 2008: 243–248; Taylor 2008; Huber 2010.

¹⁰² From house IX.1.17 in Pompeii. See *PPM* 8.878–879; Hardie 1985, 19–20; Balensiefen 1990: 56–59; 236–237; Hodske 2007: 217, cat. 633; Taylor 2008: 152–158; Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: 350–351, no. 161; Squire 2013b: 169–171.

¹⁰³ See for discussion e.g. Francis 2009; de Jong 2011; Squire 2013b.



Figure 4.11 Thetis receives the arms of Achilles, from Pompeii (IX.1.7), mid-first century CE.

influential literary treatment of a work of art, Homer describes the decoration of the shield. This decoration encompasses an entire world. War, peace, agriculture, and city life are all depicted. These scenes, moreover, seem to move and even to produce sound in Homer's telling, perhaps attesting to the lack of limits imposed on the divine artist, but perhaps also staging the kind of as-if projection of imagination crucial to fiction and thus incorporating the viewer's awestruck response to the object into its description. As Simon Goldhill has asserted, such ancient ekphrastic

writing often characterizes the visual experience of the world as an act of interpretation in and of itself.¹⁰⁴

The shield of Achilles is a frequent subject of artistic depiction from the Archaic period onward, but visual artists typically defer from taking up Homer's challenge and depicting the full breadth of the world on the shield. In the Pompeian example the artist proposes a striking solution. A figural frieze seems to ring the outer rim of the shield, but the central surface has been burnished, effectively turning it into a mirror. We see Thetis' reflection looking back at her, no mean feat given that the shield rests at an angle to the picture plane and that the reflection is distorted by its convex surface. Although this may initially seem to be a mere deferral of the Homeric challenge, it may be the strongest counter-challenge ancient art could issue. The painter of the mural was surely aware of his inability to replicate the wealth of detail in the Homeric account, but he has exploited to the fullest extent the tools at his disposal – namely the optical tricks of mimesis and the immediacy of visual representation that made painting the prime example of direct, powerful, and persuasive imagery.

No poetic verse, no matter how detailed, could replicate the illusionistic force of a mirror, which returns the world with devastating clarity. And while the painter cannot turn the surface of the painting into a genuine mirror, he can produce the effect of mirroring within his composition, reversing Thetis' image and shrinking it in size, just as a convex mirror would. The importance of this device is particularly highlighted by other shields in the picture, such as the dull bronze shields hanging above the actors, which demarcate the space visually and thematically by evoking the aristocratic Roman *atrium*, and the small shields with studded bosses hanging from the columns that serve as the architectural frame for the fictive painting. Their material and thematic specificity points to just how powerful the remediation of the shield of Achilles is, posing the question of whether, if Hephaistos were to turn the shield outward, we might see ourselves.

The same act of internal mirroring is compounded with the promise of external mirroring in a painting from the so-called *biclinium* of the House of Octavius Quartio in Pompeii (II.2.2), which likely served as an outdoor dining area, with couches and channels for flowing water set around an *aedicula*.¹⁰⁵ To the right of that *aedicula* is a representation of Pyramus and

¹⁰⁴ Goldhill 2007: 2; cf. e.g. Goldhill 1994.

¹⁰⁵ PPM 3.42–108, esp. 100–105; Spinazzola 1953: 367–421; Jashemski 1993: 73–82; Platt 2002; Hodske 2007: 168, cat. 97; 247, cat. 98; Lorenz 2008: 188–189, 394–397, 540; Taylor 2008: 64–77; Valladares 2011: 381–386; Mayer 2012: 199–209; Knox 2015.



Figure 4.12 Narcissus, *biclinium*, House of Octavius Quartio, Pompeii (II.2.2), mid-first century CE.

Thisbe. The painting depicts the lovers' deaths: Thisbe falls upon a dagger after discovering the mortally wounded Pyramus. But the two youths had first met through the crack in an external wall separating their families' adjoining properties. The painting appears near the boundary of Octavius Quartio's property; does this position suggest an overlap between the world of myth and that of everyday life? Such an interpretation is pointed to by the painting on the left of the *biclinium*, which shows Narcissus (Figure 4.12). Here he looks away from both the viewer and his own

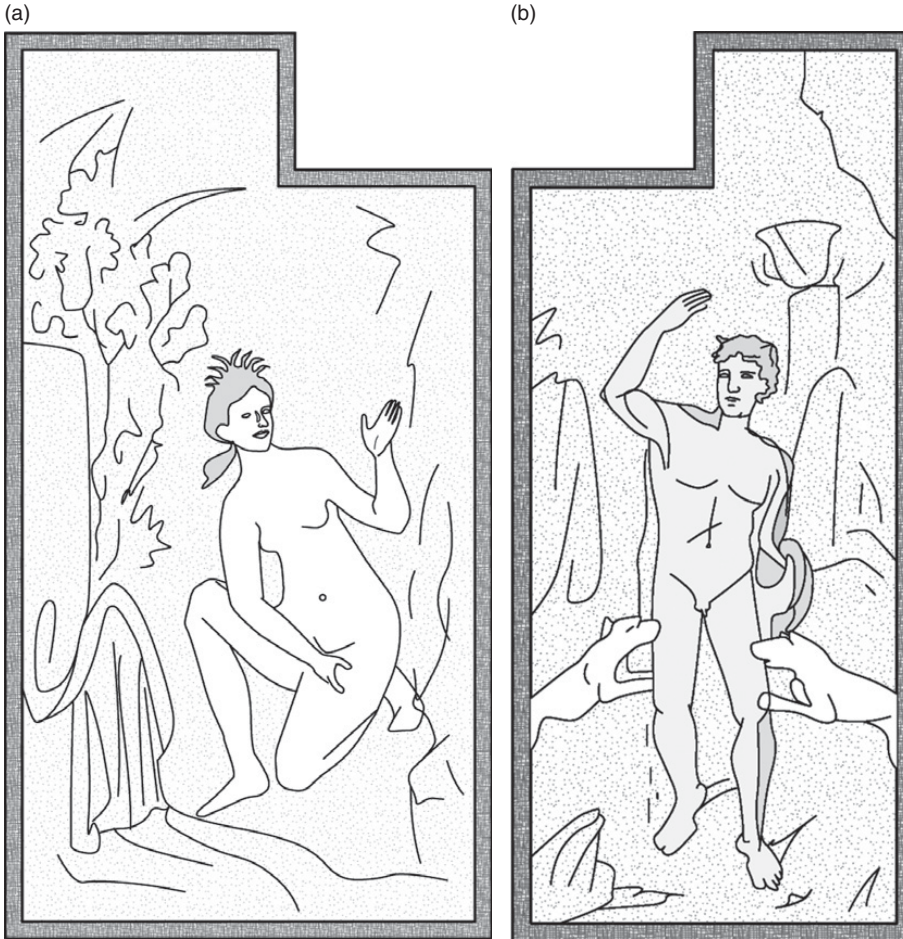


Figure 4.13 Diana and Actaeon, garden, House of Octavius Quartio, Pompeii (II.2.2), mid-first century CE. Drawing by Allison Méndez.

image, which, moreover, resembles less the beautiful youth above it and more the *gorgoneion*, the terrifying face of Medusa, whose gaze threatens to turn its beholder to stone. The analogy is apt: the evocation of Medusa threatens to entrap the viewer, just like Narcissus is transfixed by his own image. A further act of mirror would have occurred when the *biclinium* was in use, as the reclining inhabitant of the room, also surrounded by water, would have occupied a position similar to that of Narcissus, implying that she or he may likewise have been under threat of self-fascination.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Platt 2002: 91; Elsner 2007: 167–176.

Finally, on the other side of the garden of the same house, we find representations of Diana and Actaeon on either side of a doorway (Figure 4.13).¹⁰⁷ A popular motif in Roman painting, the hunter Actaeon surprised Diana at her bath and in so doing violated her chastity. His punishment was to be turned into a deer and brought down by his own hunting dogs. To the left of the door is Diana, crouching but turning with hands upraised as though to fend off an intruder. To the right is Actaeon, whose metamorphosis is indicated by horns springing from his head and whose dogs ravage his legs. A powerful narrative elision has occurred, which deeply implicates the viewer in the myth because we see, in fact, two moments from the story: the moment of discovery and the moment of punishment. A number of Third Style paintings show both within the same frame.¹⁰⁸ But these paintings typically repeat the figure of Actaeon, at least, which this example does not. In the scene of discovery Actaeon is absent, and though Diana looks across the doorway in his direction the implication is clear. It is the external viewer of the painting who fulfills the role of the hunter, who has put him or herself at risk of divine wrath by seeing the goddess unclothed.¹⁰⁹

No longer just a physical mirror for the mythological figure, the viewer has become an actual participant in the myth itself. That this plays out in the comparatively safe confines of the garden of an urban house makes the conceit clear for what it is. It seems unlikely that anyone would mistake the painting for the goddess, not least because the two paintings are demarcated with framing strips of color as though they were independent panels. The painting of painting is always hypermediate; it points toward its fictional status by its pretensions to discreteness. But here the artists have deliberately pushed the limits of immediacy to make the myth erupt into the everyday world. On the border between fiction and reality, ultimately, it is the living body of the viewer which acts as the device of remediation.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Hodske 2007: 194, cat. 93–94; Lorenz 2008: 209–213; cf. Taylor 2008: 86–88.

¹⁰⁸ Leach 1981. ¹⁰⁹ Cf. e.g. Platt 2002: 96–100.

¹¹⁰ See Belting 2011a; cf. the comments on intermedial re-performance in Goldhill 2017.

The Roman mural panel straddles the border between fiction and reality, between the total dissolution of its surface and the reification of its only-illusory material support. It explores the nature of medium and materiality with great acuity by deliberately staging its dual status as an object of representation and a representing object. This amounts, ultimately, to a set of reflections on the nature of representation itself. But as powerfully as such reflections intervene into the development of Roman wall painting, they are not the sole extent of the innovations afforded to the fictive panel, which also reflects deeply on questions of history.

This final chapter explores the manipulation of aspects of the fictive panel which dramatize relations of time and history. It focuses on three such aspects in particular, concentrating, first, on the relationship of the Roman fictive panel to a specific historical prototype. In place of the longstanding concept of the Roman copy of a Greek painting, I suggest a dynamic model of paradigm formation, in which open-ended relations of exemplarity rather than the hierarchical, unidirectional model of original and copy regulate the circulation of image types. Second, the chapter examines the manipulation of repertoires of myth to produce ensembles of fictive painting that signify more in aggregate than as individual parts, and, finally, it explores the notional collection of fictive panels as objects of art-historical interest. This art-historical impulse is, on the one hand, triumphalizing, but it also contains within itself a thread of ironizing subversion, which betokens a sense of belatedness, even anxiety, about Rome's place in the history of Mediterranean culture, and a desire to participate anachronically in that history. Through the juxtaposition of such contrasts we glimpse perhaps the most radical aspect of the painting of painting – the possibility that through its collection it offers us a set of heretofore unacknowledged insights into the Roman conception of art itself, in which the value of art is both visual and immaterial, historical and anachronic, aesthetic and utilitarian.

Copies and Paradigms

This book has explored a number of the ways in which the fictive panel played upon the tradition of Greek painting. But yet to be explored is whether such Roman paintings copied specific Greek paintings in any meaningful sense of that term, that is, whether any given mural panel deliberately reproduced stylistic or compositional aspects of a particular historical precedent. This is of particular importance because the question of the Roman copy is both longstanding and of outsized historiographic significance. Copies, generally understood, are works of art that deliberately seek to reproduce some or all of the major characteristics of an earlier, original work of art, primarily to communicate information about, to highlight the artistry of, or to transfer the aura of that original. In this sense copies differ from works of art deliberately produced in series or as multiples, which reproduce aspects of other works of art, but not necessarily in order to point toward an originary moment. Ancient art is indisputably rife with serial production, but it is less clear whether such works are also copies dependent upon authoritative historical precedents.¹

For the earliest modern students of the history of ancient art, especially Winckelmann, the art of Republican and Imperial Rome, filled with similar-looking, serial works, was only a pale imitation of that of Classical Greece. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Winckelmann's appraisal of the imitative or derivative aesthetic impulse of Roman art was transformed into an investigation of the Roman copy – the literal reproduction of the pre-existing, and inevitably now lost, Greek masterpieces discussed in literary sources such as Pliny and Pausanias. Scholars such as Adolf Furtwängler and his student Georg Lippold proposed that specific works of Roman art, especially mythological sculpture, often known as ideal statuary, but including items like engraved gems and mythological paintings, sought to replicate or imitate individual works of Classical or Hellenistic Greek art.² They further proposed that these originals could be recovered through the careful study of their copies in a method which mirrored the textual criticism of classical philology.

This attempt to recover lost copies, typically known as copy criticism, is beset with a number of internal contradictions in its evaluation of evidence

¹ See especially Marvin 1989; 2008.

² See e.g. Furtwängler 1893; Lippold 1923; 1951. Cf. Rodenwaldt 1909; Pfuhl 1923; Schefold 1952; Lauter-Bufe 1969; Moreno 1987; Smith 1993; Lydakis 2004. For discussion see e.g. Bergmann 1995; Trimble 2002; Marvin 2008: 120–167. Schefold 1952: 176 offers a parallel list of dates of Roman paintings and their Greek originals.

and its formulation of arguments.³ By equating the Roman artist producing mythological statuary with the Medieval scribe copying a codex, it assumes that any series of visually similar works always has an authoritative original as its source, that this original must have been a product of Classical or Hellenistic Greece, and that any variations in the series should be read as corruptions or interpolations of the genuine work.⁴ And, in asserting that the true value of the Roman mythological statue lies in the information it can provide about a no-longer extant Greek statue, the method closes off the possibility of interpreting uniquely Roman functions or even aesthetic principles for such works.⁵ It further assumes that the modern scholar possesses the ability to distinguish which elements of a Roman statue accurately reflect its original, and which are mere corruptions. This act of distinction is especially complex and delicate, for it depends upon the ability of the modern scholar to identify minutiae of the personal styles of artists with whose works that scholar, in almost all cases, has had absolutely no direct experience whatsoever.⁶

Both the proponents and the detractors of copy criticism have largely focused on mythological statuary, but many of these same questions face the study of painting. No extant paintings have been securely attributed to the masters named in ancient art writing, and the tradition of panel painting has largely been lost.⁷ But as Winckelmann's speculations equating the finds from Herculaneum with the works of the "great and

³ A large body of scholarship has been produced in the last few decades, which has highlighted the flaws of the traditional copy-criticism model. In general, see Zanker 1974; Ridgway 1984; Marvin 1989; 2008; Bartman 1992; Hallett 1995; 2005; Mattusch 1996; Gazda 2002; Hölscher 2004; German original published 1988; Perry 2005; Strocka 2005b; Anguissola 2007; 2012a; 2014; Junker, Stähli, and Kunze 2008; Klamm 2010; Barbanera 2011; Settis, Anguissola, and Gasparotto 2015.

⁴ But note that Carol Mattusch has argued that most Classical Greek bronzes were "mass-produced," that is, made from a limited number of master molds but composed and cold-worked in such a way as to add variety. Mattusch's elucidation of this combinatorial working technique throws into question many longstanding assumptions about the "originality" of Classical artworks. Mattusch 1996; 2002; cf. Daehner and Lapatin 2015.

⁵ Ridgway 1984: 3.

⁶ This is not so say, of course, that copy criticism has not proved exceptionally useful to the study of ancient art, or that it has not led to important successes. As Christopher Hallet 2005 has pointed out, the methods of copy criticism have been of great aid to historians of Roman art in understanding the serial production of statue types, especially Imperial portraits.

⁷ Although Manolis Andronikos suggested that the paintings from the interior of Tomb I may have been executed by Nikomachos and that those of Tomb II were painted by the artist responsible for the "original" painting that may have served as a source for the Alexander Mosaic – perhaps Nikomachos' student Philoxenos of Eretria. His attribution, however, is supported only by his proposed dating of the tombs, the high quality of the paintings, and the assumption that a painter working on the Macedonian royal family would have been one of the famous artists discussed in the literary sources. Andronikos 1984: 90–91, 117–119; cf. Fuhrmann

celebrated” masters of Greek painting indicate, that tradition nevertheless looms large in the modern imagination, and in any number of histories of Greek painting the student may find ample evidence taken from the record of Roman painting and mosaic.⁸ Like ideal statuary, Roman mythological painting often appears to have been produced serially. Similar compositions appear repeatedly inside Roman fictive panels, often to depict the same myth but occasionally spanning a variety of subjects. The relation of these series to authoritative Greek originals, however, is far from certain.

The problems inherent to the copy discourse are highlighted with particular acuity by the reception of the two mythological paintings from the House of Livia in Rome. These large-scale panels represent scenes of well-known myths. One has repeatedly been seen as a copy of a late Classical Greek painting, a claim that, upon examination, is difficult to maintain. But each is the earliest representation of the subject extant in Roman wall painting, and each stands near the head of a Roman serial tradition. The large panel on the right-hand wall of the *tablinum* represents the story of Io, one of Zeus’s many human lovers, watched over by Hera’s guardian Argus (Figure 5.1). In the most familiar version of the myth (Ov. *Met.* 1.587–746), Zeus transforms Io into a cow just before Hera catches them in the act of love; a suspicious Hera subsequently sets the ever vigilant, hundred-eyed Argus to watch over her. Although the painter has represented Io here as a young woman rather than a cow, two delicate horns sprouting from her forehead indicate her transformation. She sits on a rock in the foreground of the picture, and Argus leans against a boulder on the right. From behind the boulder approaches Hermes, sent by Zeus to free Io. A statue of Diana sits on a tall column in the center of the picture, behind that we see the branches of a tree.

On the back wall is another large white-ground fictive panel representing the cyclops Polyphemus lusting after Galatea. The painting is now heavily damaged; according to a nineteenth-century drawing it showed Polyphemus wading into the ocean in pursuit of the sea nymph, who flits away on the back of a hippocamp (Figure 5.2). An Eros stood on Polyphemus’ back, and several other Nereids circled around the pair. In the background rose a mountainous, tree-covered island. As the picture is preserved today, we can make out the large expanse of blue water in the

1931; Cohen 1997. For Nikomachos see *DNO* nos. 2717–2734; for Philoxenos *DNO* nos. 2740–2741.

⁸ Winckelmann 2011: 83; 1762: 30. Cf. e.g. Moreno 1987; Scheibler 1994; Lydakis 2004.



Figure 5.1 *Tablinum*, House of Livia, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century BCE. Drawing of Io and Argus panel by A. Sikkard.

lower half of the panel and the rising thrust of the mountain in the background, but few finer details are discernible.

The two paintings both represent events from common myths, but scholarship has placed the relation of each to earlier, supposedly

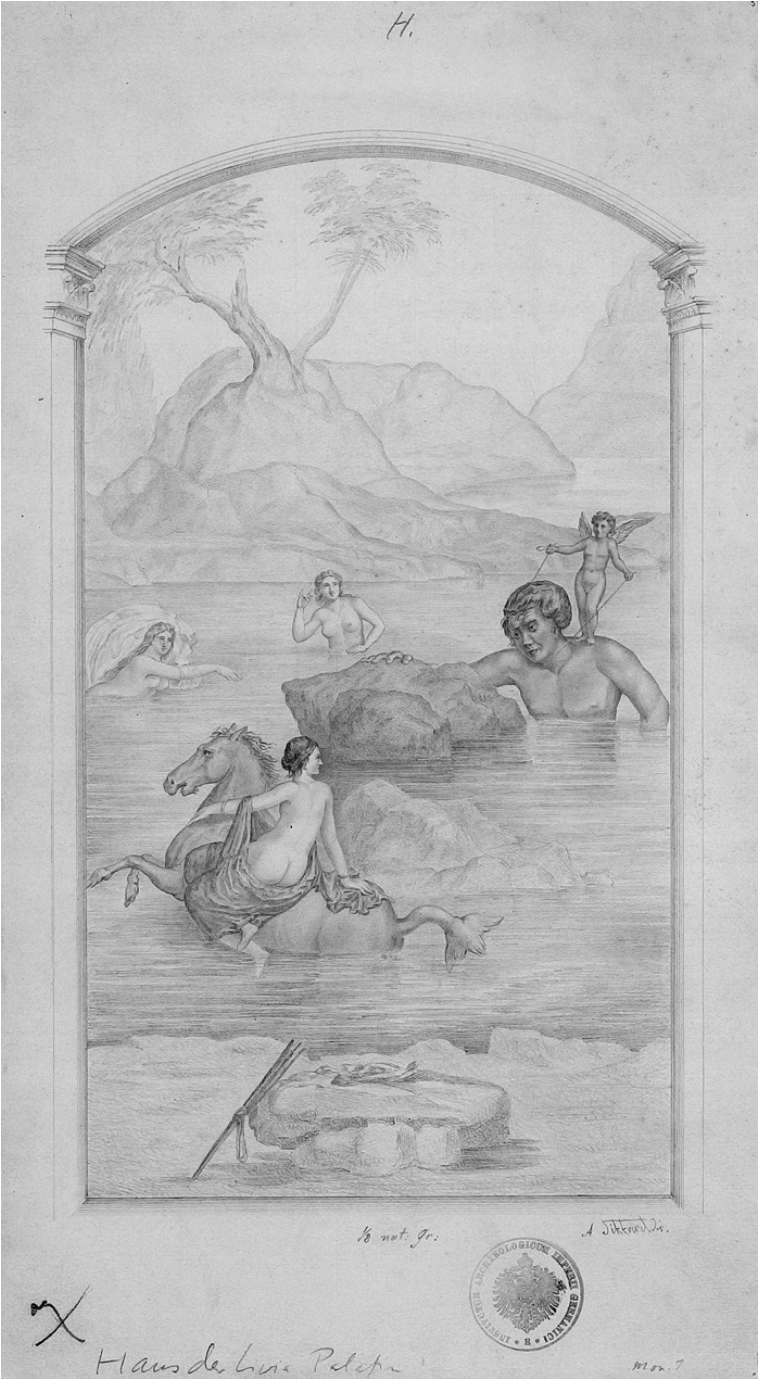


Figure 5.2 *Tablinum*, House of Livia, Palatine Hill, Rome, mid- to late first century. Drawing of Polyphemus and Galatea panel by A. Sikkard.

authoritative, representations of that myth in a different light.⁹ Scholars have long supposed that the painting of Io, Argus, and Hermes had a centuries-old, Greek pedigree, associating it with a panel attributed by Pliny to the Athenian painter Nikias, active in the later fourth century BCE (Plin. *HN* 35.132–133).¹⁰ This is to say, they have suggested that the fictive panel represents a copy of Nikias' painting, but they have also hotly debated just how close a copy it represents. Is the entire composition derived from Nikias' original? Just the figures? Or perhaps just some of those figures? Each of these has been proposed to explain the relation of original to copy.¹¹

The variety among these opinions derives, in part, from the extreme imprecision with which Pliny describes the painting; he says only that Nikias painted some large paintings, among which were depictions of Calypso, Io, and Andromeda (*HN* 35.132). But the idea that the figures and composition of the painting of Io derive directly from a late Classical precedent has also been supported by the existence of a series of Roman images. A number of different compositional types make up this series.¹² The precise composition of the House of Livia is unique; elsewhere, as at the House of Meleager in Pompeii (VI.9.2) we find the figures of Io and Argus but not that of Hermes (Figure 5.3).¹³ Still other examples show Argus and Hermes exchanging the panpipes with which Hermes will lull the watchful guardian to sleep so that he can slay him; this composition occurs, for instance, at the Temple of Isis in Pompeii (VIII.7.28).

To further complicate matters, a figure in a similar pose to that held by Argus is often used to depict Perseus freeing Andromeda after he has killed the sea monster, as at the House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6).¹⁴ Like Argus, Perseus is shown as a young man draped in a cloak but otherwise nude,

⁹ For the story of Io see especially Ov. *Met.* 1.568–746; cf. *Her.* 14.85–108. Polyphemus' love for Galatea was chronicled in a lost poem by the late fifth to early fourth-century dithyrambist Philoxenos of Cythera, Athen. *Deip.* 1.6e–7a. In the surviving material, the longest accounts of the story appear in Theocritus *Id.* 6; 11, Ovid *Met.* 728–896 and Philostratus *Imag.* 2.18.

¹⁰ Pliny assigns him to the 112th Olympiad, or ca.333–329 BCE. See Neutsch 1940: 7–14. Cf. Becatti in *EAA* 4, 475–482, s.v. *Nikias*; *DNO* nos. 2805–2827, esp. 2814–2815.

¹¹ See e.g. Helbig 1873: 142; Rodenwaldt 1909: 36–38, 228–232, 227–231; Pfuhl 1923: 753–754; Rizzo 1936a: 25–30; Neutsch 1940: 52–60; Lauter-Bufe 1969: 4; Wesenberg 1988.

¹² Wesenberg 1988; cf. Swetnam Burland 2015: 125–137. For the long-term development of the iconography of Io, see Yalouris 1986.

¹³ *PPM* 4.660–818, esp. 681; Hodske 226, cat. 248; Lorenz 2008: 330–353, esp. 338–339, 558; Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: 288–289; no. 122; cf. Newby 2016: 208–227. For further examples, see Hodske 2007: 226, cat. 295, 542, 790.

¹⁴ Hodske 2007: 181–182. In at least two instances, both Argus and Perseus were painted in the same pose within a single house – the House of Meleager (VI.9.2, 13) and House IX.9.d. See additionally on the representation of Perseus and Andromeda: Phillips 1968; Schmalz 1989b; cf. Blanckenhagen and Alexander 1990: 28–40.

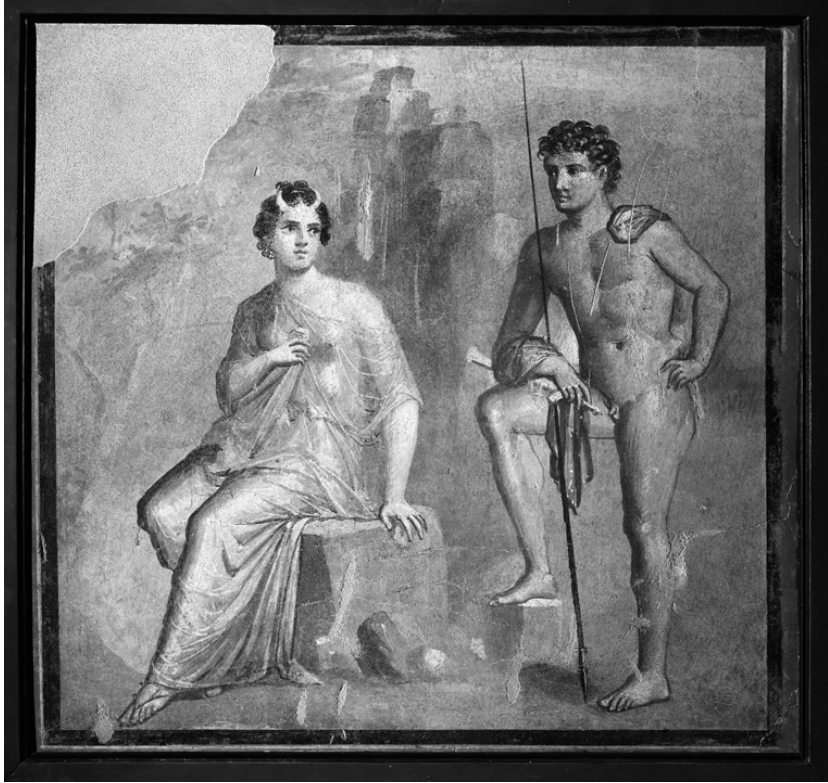


Figure 5.3 Io and Argus, House of Meleager, Pompeii (VI.9.2,13), mid- to late first century CE.

with one foot raised on a rock, his torso presented frontally but his head in profile, with his head inclined down. Because Pliny mentions that Nikias also painted a panel depicting the myth of Andromeda (*HN* 35.132), it has been suggested that both the Io and Andromeda compositions may reflect the appearance of paintings by Nikias.¹⁵

We cannot as a matter of course prove or disprove if the panel from the House of Livia was based upon Nikias' painting, which does not survive. It may have been; Nikias was among the better-represented late Classical Greek painters in Rome, with four panels displayed in public places by the early Empire, many dedicated by members of the Imperial family.¹⁶ But

¹⁵ E.g. Rizzo 1936a: 28–30; Becatti in *EAA* 4, 475–482, s.v. *Nikias*; Ling 1991: 129–130; Scheibler 1994: 65–67; *contra* Schmalz 1989b.

¹⁶ These were a Dionysus, or Liber Pater, in the temple of Concord; a Hyacinth in the temple of the Divine Augustus, dedicated by Tiberius; a painting of Alexander placed in the Portico of Pompey, and a Nemea erected in the Curia Iulia. See Plin. *HN* 35.131–132; cf. *HN* 35.27; *DNO* nos. 2805–2809.



Figure 5.4 Io and Argus, drawing of a Lucanian Amphora attributed to the Choephoroi Painter, mid-fourth century BCE. Formerly Coghill Collection, current location unknown. After Lenormant and de Witte, *Élite des monuments céramographiques*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1844), pl. 26.

even if that were the case, it appears that Nikias did not invent the composition itself. On a now-lost Lucanian red-figure amphora attributed to the Choephoroi Painter and dated to around 340 BCE, we find Io and Argus posed in a mirror image of the Roman composition (Figure 5.4).¹⁷ Argus stands with one foot up on a rock, leaning forward and resting his arms on his knee, just as he does as in Roman wall paintings. Furthermore, in a precise parallel to the panel from the House of Livia, and only to that panel, a statue of a female deity, probably Artemis or Hera herself, stands on top of a dedicatory column in the middle of the composition.

The vase is traditionally dated a decade before the *floruit* given by Pliny for Nikias, whom he placed in the 112th Olympiad, 333–329 BCE. This is not a definitive point either way – vases, much less now-missing vases, can be difficult to date with absolute precision on the basis of drawing style alone. Pliny may have been mistaken, and the difference of a decade is not

¹⁷ See *LIMC* V s.v. Io I.III.5, 669, no. 59. Io moreover is shown as a seated young woman with horns growing from her forehead even earlier in fifth-century Attic Red Figure vase painting. See e.g. a *skyphos* from ca.415 BCE, in *LIMC* V, s.v. Io, I, no. 35; cf. nos. 39; 43; 56. Leach 1988: 379–381 suggests that the appearance of these figure types in earlier vase painting may speak in favor of a Classical date for the composition.



Figure 5.5 Io's Arrival in Egypt, House of the Duke d'Aumale (VI.7.15), Pompeii, mid-to late first century CE.

so great. Yet we might well wonder whether an Athenian painter could have devised a specific composition for the representation of a specific myth that became so popular that it was repeated in a different medium in Southern Italy within a decade or two. Is this compositional scheme an invention of Greek-speaking Southern Italy?¹⁸ Or is it older still?

It remains possible that Nikias' painting of Io may not have even been a scene of her imprisonment under Argus, but of her arrival in Egypt, which is attested twice in Pompeian murals, at the Temple of Isis (VIII.7.28) and the House of the Duke d'Aumale (VI.7.15) (Figure 5.5).¹⁹ Moreover, the figural type of the young man draped in a cloak with one foot raised on a rock and upper body bent forward is attested a full century earlier than Nikias' career. It appears, for example, on a white-ground calyx krater from ca.450–440 BCE by the Phiale Painter, now in the civic museum of Agrigento.²⁰ Here Andromeda, labeled, is bound to three

¹⁸ As Kyle Phillips, for example, has argued about Pompeian representations of Perseus rescuing Andromeda. Phillips 1968.

¹⁹ Hodske 2007: 227, cat. no. 239. For further discussion see Swetnam Burland 2015: 125–137.

²⁰ ARV² 1017.53. See LIMC I, 776, s.v. *Andromeda* I.III, no. 5.

standing sticks, and Perseus, also labeled and bearing winged cap and sandals, stands in the familiar pose just to her left. The comparison is not precise, as in the Pompeian examples Perseus stands much closer to Andromeda and lifts up one arm to free her, but his forward lean and raised foot are remarkably consistent across the various representations.²¹ The figural type of the young man, nude but for a cloak slung over one shoulder, with one foot raised on a rock and leaning forward, even appears twice on the Parthenon frieze.²² This exceptionally public and prominent monument, which also significantly predated Nikias' career, may have been better known than a panel painting, though its imagery could only have circulated by means of an intermediary.²³ This all seems to indicate that the Io panel from the House of Livia does not replicate a single, securely authored scene that circulated due to the authority of its original, but participates in a complex and freely circulating visual *koiné*, which included figural types that had been available to artists and comprehensible to viewers around the Mediterranean for centuries.²⁴

The reception of the other mythological scene in the room, showing Polyphemos and Galatea, further complicates the questions of transmission raised by the Io panel. In the literary tradition, the myth of Polyphemos and Galatea appears to have been as popular as that of Io. Paintings of the myth were even more frequent – one study identified 21 representations among Pompeian paintings, compared to only ten depictions of Io.²⁵ But no other version, literary or artistic, features either Polyphemos wading out into the ocean to chase after Galatea or the figure of Eros driving him on.²⁶ And the evidence for an earlier version of this painting is even slimmer than for the painting of Io.²⁷

²¹ There were, however, also many variant representations of the rescue of Andromeda. In Pompeian painting alone, Jürgen Hodske has also identified four distinct types. It is not clear that any of these referred to Nikias' composition. See Hodske 2007: 180–184, cf. 326; Phillips 1968. Cf. LIMC I, 774–790, s.v. *Andromeda* I.

²² As figure 12 on West Block VI and figure 29 on West Block XV. See e.g. Jenkins 1994: 106–107, 110–111.

²³ On the afterlife of the frieze, see e.g. Neils 2001: 203–238. On the circulation of motifs and images in the ancient Mediterranean, see recently Donderer 2008; Stauffer 2008; 2016; Schmidt-Colinet 2016.

²⁴ For which see e.g. Trimble 2011. ²⁵ Hodske 2007: 196–200, 226–227, 324, 326.

²⁶ For a discussion of the full variety of literary and artistic representations of the myths of Polyphemos, see Squire 2009: 300–356; cf. Leach 1988: 339–344.

²⁷ Rizzo 1936a: 35–40. No earlier representations have survived showing Polyphemos and Galatea together. Depictions of Polyphemos are among the earliest identifiable mythological narratives in Greek art, but usually refer to his role in the *Odyssey*. Snodgrass 1998: 89–100; Giuliani 2013: 70–88. I know of only two representations of Galatea that pre-date the House of Livia. A Red-Figure Etruscan cup from Volterra, probably from the second half of the fifth century, seems to

Yet the Io and Polyphemus panels occupy remarkably similar positions within Roman painting. While both are compositionally unique, they also stand at the beginning of a long tradition of representations of their respective subjects in Roman murals. At least seven other paintings, including examples at the Augustan villa at Boscotrecase (Figure 5.6) and at the House of the Priest Amandus in Pompeii (I.7.7), repeat key aspects of the Palatine painting.²⁸ These aspects relate less to the execution and disposition of figures than to the setting in which the action occurs. In all of these examples, as Theocritus details in the *Idylls* (11.13–16) and Philostratus would come to describe in the *Imagines* (2.18), Polyphemus sits or stands on the shore in love-sick grief while Galatea cavorts in the ocean, rather than wading into the water, as he does at the House of Livia. But as in Rome, in the Campanian versions Galatea sits side saddle on the back of a hippocamp or dolphin, and cliffs rise steeply from the water's edge. In the House of the Colored Capitals (VI.4.31.51) a small Eros figure is present, though there he hovers above Galatea, shading her with a small parasol.²⁹ These examples especially share with the panel from the House of Livia an attention to the interaction between sea, land, and atmospheric conditions. Above all, it is the interest in landscape, rather than the figural composition, which unites this pictorial tradition.

If we look beyond the poses of individual figures, the afterlives of the compositions of the two central paintings are sufficiently similar that, without Pliny's off-hand comment, scholars might have viewed both works under the same methodological and historical lens, rather than asking one to stand in for an absent original and thus perpetuating the common story of Roman copying. It is this afterlife, moreover, which may help us reorient our view of the circulation of two-dimensional images in the Mediterranean world. The paintings of both Io and Polyphemus that follow the examples from the House of Livia are not copies of the earlier artworks in any precise sense, even when they repeat certain aspects of those works. Why then should we expect a painting from the Palatine,

have shown the nymph alone, riding on a sea-creature, LIMCV, 1001, *supp. s.v. Galateia*, no. 7, and an Attic white-ground lekythos of the last quarter of the fifth century BCE may have shown her and other Nereids bringing armor to Achilles ARV² 1248.9; LIMCV, 1004, *supp. s.v. Galateia* I, no. 40. Neither is especially close iconographically to the painting from the House of Livia.

²⁸ See Hodske 2007: 196–198; although Blanckenhagen denies a connection between the Polyphemus panels in the House of Livia and the later version at the Villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscotrecase, Blanckenhagen and Alexander 1990: 35–37. Apart from these two examples, the myth appears in Pompeii at the House of the Mariner (VII.1.2, 15), The House of Dido and Aeneas (IX.6.9), House IX.7.12, the House of the Ancient Hunt (VII.4.43, 44, 48).

²⁹ Hodske 2007: 197, cat. 477.



Figure 5.6 Polyphemus and Galatea, Villa of Agrippa Postumus at Boscotrecase, late first century BCE.

more finely executed and in a more prestigious location, to be a copy either?

An increasingly large body of literature has revealed that both the formation of replica series and the relationship of Greek to Roman art were much more varied and complicated than the simple dichotomy of

original/copy permits.³⁰ This is not to say that copies, even precise copies, did not exist in antiquity. The widespread dissemination of the Imperial portrait throughout the Roman Empire attests otherwise.³¹ Similarly, numerous fragments of casts of sculptures have been recovered from the site of Baia on the Bay of Naples.³² Many of these casts are unidentifiable, but they include such statue types as the Apollo Belvedere,³³ and the early fifth-century Tyrannicide group produced by Kritios and Nesiotes for the Athenian Agora.³⁴ The discovery of the casts has answered many technical questions about the reproduction of statuary: sculptors could take impressions directly from originals, produce casts from the impressions, and from those casts produce either precise replicas in terracotta and metal or free copies in marble using the casts as models.

Yet the discovery of empirical evidence for the production of precise replicas does not, by itself, reveal the motivations lying behind such production. For example, the Apollo Belvedere, whose fame is more modern than ancient, exists in just one complete version, and while it is often attributed to the sculptor Leochares, this is only on the slightest evidence, as Ellen Perry has shown.³⁵ The Tyrannicide group, which is known from a variety of literary sources and whose basic pose is already attested in Classical vase painting, functions in classrooms today to illustrate an important step in the development of the Early Classical style, but in antiquity it may have been better known for its public, political function than for its art-historical value.³⁶ In other words, the motivations for replication may remain obscure even when the technical means of reproduction are clarified.

The situation is perhaps even more complex in the case of painting. The mechanical reproduction of two-dimensional images, such as that permitted by the print or photograph, did not exist in antiquity, but hand-

³⁰ See e.g. Fullerton 1997: 437–440; Perry 2005; Marvin 2008; Small 2008; Anguissola 2014; Settis, Anguissola, and Gasparotto 2015.

³¹ Fejfer 2008: 407–425; cf. Pfanner 1989; Boschung 1993.

³² For Baia see Landwehr 1982; 1985. More recently on casts in antiquity see Frederiksen 2010; Landwehr 2010. Precise copies may have been prestige pieces in ways in which free adaptations or variants were not, as Landwehr estimates that a precise copy in marble may have taken twice as long to produce as a new commission. On the mechanical reproduction of statues, see e.g. Cic. *Acad.* 2.85–86; Plin. *HN* 35.153; Lucian *Iupp. trag.* 33; Juv. 2.4–5; cf. Platt 2006. On the importance of the standardization and serialization of artistic production during the Empire, see additionally Pfanner 1989; MacMullen 2000: 124–138; Heilmeyer 2008.

³³ See e.g. Perry 2005: 1–6; cf. Mattusch 2002: 99–101, with bibliography; *DNO* no. 2037.

³⁴ Brunnsåker 1971; Neer 2010: 78–85; Azoulay 2017; *DNO* nos. 558–562. ³⁵ Perry 2005: 1–6.

³⁶ It has been suggested, in fact, that the reasons behind the replication of statues in antiquity were only rarely art-historical. Ridgway 1984: 6; cf. e.g. Pape 1975: 100.

made copies of paintings were apparently produced. Quintilian disparages painters who copy others' works onto a graphed surface (*Inst.* 10.2.6–7), and Lucian discusses a copy of a painting of centaurs by the late Classical painter Zeuxis, which was made, he asserts, by means of precise, fine measurements, and which was as informative of Zeuxis' techniques as of his iconographic innovations.³⁷ Yet he also admits that the original of this painting had been lost in a shipwreck more than a century earlier, and offers no way to confirm the copy's accuracy. More generally, in the absence of modern techniques of producing and disseminating two-dimensional images, the ability of any given person to accurately identify a copy of a famous historical painting would have been severely limited.³⁸ Near-exact copies occur with some frequency in the corpus of Pompeian wall painting,³⁹ but there are many ways to imagine how such images could have circulated among workshops of Italian painters without falling back on the irresistible aura exerted by a famous Greek original.

Yet the idea of the Greek original masterwork, of course, existed sufficiently strongly in the ancient imagination to have been passed down to modernity. That this idea circulated in tandem with the material reality of the serial production of artworks caused little apparent dissonance among ancient thinkers.⁴⁰ According to Pliny, for instance, during the reign of Nero the most famous panel painting in Greco-Roman antiquity, Apelles' *Aphrodite Anadyomene*, rotted away at the bottom, and no artist sufficiently skilled could be found to repair it.⁴¹ Nero, accordingly, replaced the panel with a work by Dorotheus, an otherwise unknown painter. Pliny asserts that this event amplified the glory of Apelles, whose skill no living artist could match. But we might instead think it demonstrates a strange willingness to do away with a singular and unique masterpiece, a point Pliny does not raise.⁴² It is this lack of dissonance, we might propose, this

³⁷ Lucian *Zeu.* 3–7; *DNO* no. 1729. ³⁸ Small 2008.

³⁹ Clarke 2010; cf. Esposito 2010. In analyzing the production of such near-exact painted copies, Clarke has isolated four possible modes of transmission: memory, books with illustrations of individual figural types, books with outline drawings of entire scenes, and books with colored versions of entire scenes, and has suggested that all four may have been used in the production of Pompeian painting in the first century CE. Cf. Weitzmann 1947; Lauter-Bufe 1969: 2; Schefold 1976; Andersen 1985; Allison 1991: 80–82; Ling 1991: 128–135; Croisille 2005: 196–200.

⁴⁰ Sufficiently so that it has been proposed that antiquity may even have lacked a concept of the artistic copy as a product that was secondary and inferior to its original. Bartman 1992: 11–13.

⁴¹ Plin. *HN* 35.91; *DNO* nos. 2877–2897. In a similar vein, a painting by Aristides was supposedly ruined because a painter hired to restore it was not sufficiently skilled. Plin. *HN* 35.100.

⁴² Note that the Eros of Thespiae by Praxiteles, taken away to Rome by Caligula, was at various times replaced by a copy in its original location and physically restituted to the site. See Lapatin 2010: 263, with ancient sources and bibliography; cf. *DNO* nos. 1813–1834. Pliny also relates,

ability to simultaneously accept both a model of art that is authorial and historically specific – the masterwork model – and a model which encompasses much more fluid relations between artists and artworks – the serial model, understood to incorporate all manner of relations of similarity without presupposing an original – which has proved so difficult for modern historians to interpret.

The phenomenon of the fictive panel appears to occupy a unique position in this nexus. The mural panel stages both history and contemporaneity; it both imitates and replaces, both doubles and disrupts, a more authoritative artistic form. This occurs as much through format and mode of display as through style or iconography. The compositions of the Io and Polyphemus panels may, or may not, have depended upon those of earlier paintings, but their formats point toward a historical tradition, and they themselves seem to have become points of reference in their own right. Media theory emphasizes the importance of this privileging of format.⁴³ In the remediation performed by the painting of painting, the conditions of the production of one art form become the explicit subject matter of another. The reproduction of any internal characteristics is only secondary. Rather than proclaiming itself to be a copy, replica, or imitation, then, the fictive panel announces the conditions under which a copy could appear, but it also exceeds the limitations imposed by a such a unidirectional, dichotomous model.

In a series of influential studies of the relationship of European Renaissance art to its Medieval, Early Christian, and ancient precursors, Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood have advocated for the temporal plurality of the work of art. Understood as anachronic, as they term it, the artwork exists at a present time, and was made by actual hands at an actual past time, but tends to points away from those times.⁴⁴ It may point toward a mythical past, a prior artwork, or to a divinity outside of time itself; it may also point toward the future. This plural temporality gives the work of art special claims to authority, especially important in the Christian period when the referential validity of any given holy image was in flux. Such authority is achieved, Nagel and Wood claim, by the retrospective creation of a substitutional chain, in which each moment of artistic innovation is actualized only by the fictional, retrospective creation

however, that when the Emperor Tiberius removed the *Apoxyomenos* of Lysippus from the Baths of Agrippa in order to place it in his private collection, the Roman public was distinctly unsatisfied with its replacement. Protests were so vehement that the Emperor was obliged to return the original Lysippan statue to public display. Plin. *HN* 34.62; *DNO* no. 2226.

⁴³ McLuhan 1964. ⁴⁴ Nagel and Wood 2005; 2010; Wood 2008; Nagel 2011.

of a series of earlier, purer, more authoritative works.⁴⁵ The temporally plural artwork links present to past with a concrete and physical, albeit rationally fictional, bond.

Similar kinds of substitutions occurred in ancient Rome. Beyond the case of Dorotheus, Pliny recounts how Claudius had the face of Alexander in two portraits painted by Apelles removed and replaced with that of Augustus.⁴⁶ In architecture, the practice of substitution, often occasioned by practical needs, was even more common. Augustus recounts that he had rebuilt or repaired 82 temples in his sixth consulship alone (*RG* 20), and numerous inscriptions from the city of Rome attest to temples and other buildings that were rebuilt, restored, or renovated.⁴⁷ Significantly, such structures, even when rebuilt entirely, were not considered to be *new* buildings – they were the same buildings, whose appearance had merely been updated. Augustus quite proudly states that he did not take credit for those temples whose renovation he sponsored (*RG* 20), and, perhaps most famously, Hadrian accompanied his complete redesign and rebuilding of the Pantheon with an inscription in the entablature crediting the original patron of the first Pantheon, Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa.⁴⁸ For all this, however, the substitutional model does not map precisely onto ancient artistic culture, which tended to agonize less over both reliability of reference and the quest for origins, although as Jaś Elsner has argued, archaism could often serve as a sacralizing framing device.⁴⁹

Antiquity has, however, supplied a model of thought that helps to place the mural panel within the nexus of similarity and difference, of production and reproduction, and especially of history and anachronism, among ancient works of art. This is the model of the paradigm. In common usage, in antiquity as today, a paradigm, *paradeigma*, is usually understood as a model for imitation – an example which contains, in an especially clear or prominent way, the pertinent features that an imitator should strive to replicate.⁵⁰ This model could be physical, such as an architectural model,⁵¹ or a human body,⁵² but it could also be notional or ideal.⁵³ But the paradigm also had a more technical usage related to the formation of knowledge. One vision of the paradigm was Platonic; it conceived of the paradigm as a relation between general rules and individual cases.⁵⁴ But

⁴⁵ Nagel and Wood 2010: 11. ⁴⁶ Plin. *HN* 35.93–94; *DNO* nos. 2916–2918.

⁴⁷ See e.g. Thomas and Witschel 1992. ⁴⁸ *CIL* 6.896. ⁴⁹ Elsner 2017.

⁵⁰ Pollitt 1974: 204–215. ⁵¹ E.g. *Hdt.* 5.62; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 49.3.

⁵² E.g. Plot. *Enn.* 5.9.11; Call. *Desc.* 5.3.

⁵³ E.g. Pl. *Rep.* 500e; *Soph.* 235e; *Tim.* 28a–b; Arist. *Poet.* 1461b11; Strab. *Geog.* 8.3.30.

⁵⁴ This rule/instance or token/type distinction is particularly evident in the theory of forms: e.g. Plat. *Rep.* 476a; 596a–b. Cf. Fujisawa 1974; Perl 1999.

another, as Giorgio Agamben has elucidated, was based on a series of relations between particulars.⁵⁵ In this view, paradigmatic thinking does not derive general conditions from particular statements, as in induction, nor does it reconstruct particular statements from general conditions, as in deduction. Paradigmatic logic functions, Aristotle asserts, neither as a part with respect to the whole, nor as whole with respect to a part, but instead as a part with respect to a part (Arist. *Pri. An.* 69a15–16).⁵⁶ It is analogical, rather than deductive or inductive.⁵⁷ It depends, accordingly, on a relation of similarity, and insofar as similarity is potentially symmetrical, the model of the paradigm may create groups from an assemblage of individual cases as model becomes copy becomes model once again.⁵⁸ The result, as Agamben formulates it, is that: “in the paradigm, there is no origin or *archē*; every phenomenon is the origin, every image archaic.”⁵⁹

The concept of the *paradeigma* is closely connected to the ubiquitous Roman principle of exemplarity.⁶⁰ In the political realm the example carried a moral connotation, as a model of correct behavior, the identification and description of which among great figures of the Roman past was one of the primary rhetorical strategies of Roman historiography.⁶¹ It was in this sense simultaneously both retrospective and oriented toward the future; Augustus asserts in the *Res Gestae* that he both revived *exempla* from that past that were in danger of dying out and himself provided *exempla* for future generations (*RG* 8.5).⁶² The strictures of time and space are circumvented in favor of the immediacy of exemplarity: past and future collapse anachronically onto the figure of Augustus through a relation of similarity. This same anachronism appears to be at play when the primary terms of exemplarity – *exemplar* and *exemplum* – are used to designate both models and copies.⁶³ The exemplary logic of the paradigm is manifold and inclusive, rather than oppositional or dialectic. It is a logic of both-and, rather than one of either/or. As such it is uniquely positioned to help us

⁵⁵ Agamben 2009: 9–32. ⁵⁶ ὡς μέρος πρὸς μέρος. Cf. Plat. *Pol.* 278b–c.

⁵⁷ For the role of analogy in Roman art see esp. Koortbojian 1995: 1–18.

⁵⁸ On the symmetry of similarity see Goodman 1968: 3–6. ⁵⁹ Agamben 2009: 31.

⁶⁰ Agamben 2009: 18. Festus offers a definition (*Glos. Lat* 82M): “An *exemplum* is that which we should follow or avoid, an *exemplar*, that to which we should make similar. The former is judged by the mind, the latter witnessed by the eyes” (*Exemplum est, quod sequamur, aut vitemus. Exemplar, ex quo simile faciamus. Illud animo aestimatur, istud oculis conspicitur*). Cf. Habinek 1996: 45–46; Glinister *et al.* 2007.

⁶¹ Hölkesskamp 1996; Chaplin 2000; Roller 2004; 2009; Haimson Lushkov 2015.

⁶² Roller 2004: 32–34; Chaplin 2000: 195–196; Lowrie 2007: 102–112.

⁶³ For the former see e.g. Cic. *Rep.* 2.22; *De Orat* 3.137; *Fin.* 4.5; Hor. *Ars.* 268; Verg. *Aen.* 11.758; Vit. *De arch.* 1.1.4; Ov. *Fast.* 4.423, and for the latter e.g. Cic. *Amic.* 23; *Att.* 4.5.1; 9.14.1; 13.46.5; Nep. *Alc.* 4.5; Ov. *Tr.* 1.7.24. Anguissola 2006: 563–572; 2012a: 73–76.

better understand the particularities of artistic production and reproduction in the ancient world. In the paradigm, similarity and difference play out reciprocally; rather than the dichotomy of original and copy, or even the succession of seriality, the paradigm permits an exceptionally flexible range of relations between the images, objects, and ideas that constitute ancient works of art.⁶⁴

The concepts of paradigm and example, I would suggest, help illuminate how the Roman fictive panel, understood as a discrete format of painting designated for the delivery of specific kinds of content, may not be a copy, a mere imitation, or an approximation of a more prestigious art form – the independent Greek panel painting.⁶⁵ Rather, one way to understand the mural panel is as a paradigmatic addition to the larger category of panel painting: as an attempt, through paradigm formation, to broaden what constitutes a panel, and to place the products of the Roman present in the same category as those of the Greek past. The concept of the paradigm relieves the fictive panel from the burden of the copy or replica by re-orienting its temporality. Understood paradigmatically, the fictive panel simultaneously looks both backwards and forwards in time and denies the significance of temporal succession. Its creation becomes an act of anachronism.

Ensembles

As an exemplary paradigm rather than a copy, the fictive panel would seem to stand in a much less tortuous relationship to the art of the Greek past. It would also be freed up, significantly, to act as a fiction, and to stand in creative relationships with other fictive panels in ways in which the original/copy model permits much less easily. One way for Roman painters to create such inter-pictorial relationships was in the formation of ensembles of fictive paintings, groupings whose collective significance exceeded their individual parts, which play more overtly on the history of myth than on the history of painting, but in so doing show how the poetics of groups of paintings might be produced by their mutual interrelationships. Such ensembles put together fictive paintings, and the content those paintings

⁶⁴ On exemplarity in the visual arts, see e.g. Stewart 2006; Newby 2016. Goldhill 2017 makes a related point in highlighting the significance of reperformance in the history of ancient literature.

⁶⁵ As Lauren Hackworth-Petersen 2006: 142–144 has similarly suggested by calling representations of *pinacothecae* on Roman walls *simulacra*, rather than imitations.

depict, in ways that would be possible but more difficult to achieve with physical panels, playing not only on the narrative and thematic relationships among mythic episodes but also on the compositional resonances among pictures.

Narrative or iconographic programs are largely absent from early examples of the painting of painting in the Second Style, although the *Odyssey* frescoes from Rome and the Trojan paintings from the House of the Cryptoporticus in Pompeii (I.6.2) demonstrate that narrative cycles could certainly be deployed.⁶⁶ But typically we find assemblages of landscape, genre, or mythological paintings that do not clearly relate to each other in thematic or narrative senses. Cycles of paintings remain relatively rare, but they do become a feature of the Third Style. A particularly potent example appears at the so-called Villa Imperiale at Pompeii, a structure just outside the Porta Marina built on what was evidently once public land, though it does not appear to have been genuinely linked to the Imperial family.⁶⁷ In a large reception room we find a set of Third Style paintings along the first story of the wall, whose interest and importance to the family is documented by the fact that it was preserved when the upper story and vault were later updated to the Fourth Style.⁶⁸ On all three walls the decoration consists primarily of a once-red backing wall set above a narrow stage and topped by an expanse of white. At the center of each wall an *aedicula* frames a large-scale, vertically oriented, embedded panel with a mythological painting on a white background. On top of the backing wall to either side of the *aediculae* are smaller representations of panel paintings on bases, whose subjects seem to revolve around poetic and musical education.⁶⁹

It is the central panels, however, which constitute the most intriguing aspect of the room, as these represent scenes from the Cretan cycle, the set of myths relating to Minos' kingdom of Crete. Minos himself is absent from the paintings at the Villa Imperiale, but his presence is felt at every turn. On the right wall we find the death of Icarus (Figure 5.7), the son of the master craftsman Daedalus, who constructed the labyrinth meant to contain the monstrous Minotaur, child of Minos' wife Pasiphae and a bull (a union which Daedalus himself had facilitated).⁷⁰ On the back wall of the room we find the death of the Minotaur at the hands of the Athenian

⁶⁶ On the meaningful assemblage of figural painting within Roman houses, see e.g. Schefold 1952; Thompson 1960; Brilliant 1984: 53–89; Bergmann 1996; 1999; Trimble 2002; Lorenz 2008; cf. Newby 2016: 164–227.

⁶⁷ Pappalardo and Grimaldi 2005; Pappalardo, Ciardiello, and Grimaldi 2008: 302–305.

⁶⁸ Beyen 1956; Allroggen-Bedel 1975; Pappalardo 1987; 1995; 1997; Moormann 1988: 221–224; Bergmann 1999: 82–85; Lorenz 2008: 295–296, 626–627; Bragantini 2014: 331–332.

⁶⁹ Scheibler 1998: 6–9. ⁷⁰ Blanckenhagen 1968; Hodske 2007: 208, cat. 570; Lorenz 2008: 242.



Figure 5.7 Fall of Icarus, Room A, Villa Imperiale di Pompeii, early first century CE.

youth Theseus (Figure 5.8), son of the king of Athens, who had come as one of a number of human offerings sent to Crete every year by the vassal state but who ultimately liberated the Athenians by defeating the Minotaur.⁷¹

Theseus was only able to accomplish this task, however, with the aid of Minos' daughter Ariadne, who provided him with a string so that he might navigate the labyrinth. She then fled with him, but Theseus soon deserted Ariadne on the island of Naxos. The central section of the panel on the left wall is poorly preserved, but what is left shows Theseus ascending the gangplank of a ship. This is, presumably, the moment of Ariadne's abandonment.⁷² We might continue the cycle in our minds: Theseus, preoccupied by his action, fails to raise a white sail on his return to Athens. His father Aegeus interprets this to mean that Theseus had perished, and casts himself into the sea, and so on.

The fictive painting here emphasizes its role as the bearer of fiction, the carrier of mythic content. In showing us a set of narratively related but not strictly thematic scenes, the paintings at the Villa Imperiale do something much like contemporary poetry. In Ovid's account of the events of the Cretan cycle (*Met.* 8.152–235), for example, these specific events are only

⁷¹ Hodske 2007: 228, cat. 569; Lorenz 2008: 91–94; cf. Schmalz 1989a.

⁷² Parise-Badoni 1990: esp. 74–76; Hodske 2007: 156, cat. 571; Lorenz 2008: 99–100; cf. Frederick 1995.



Figure 5.8 Theseus and the Minotaur, Room A, Villa Imperiale di Pompeii, early first century CE.

a part of the larger narrative, but they are among the most significant, as both moments of high tension and sites prime for thick poetic description. But united as they are in format, palette, and style, the paintings elicit other associations as well. An emphasis on the sea comes through particularly clearly in the Villa Imperiale, both the tragic death it represents for Icarus and the freedom (and, ultimately, tragedy again) it offers Theseus. The positioning of the paintings around the room is equally important. The viewer may initially associate with the triumphant Theseus on the back wall, but the cost of that triumph is made clear on the wings in Daedalus' incipient grief and Ariadne's abandonment. The ensemble is created as such, in other words, through a variety of both narrativ and formal connections.⁷³

Ensembles could also be formed from less forthright connections among fictive paintings. A particularly sophisticated example of this impulse was created at the House of Jason in Pompeii (IX.5.18), sometimes known as the

⁷³ Bergmann 1999: 82–85 further emphasizes the presence of onlookers within all three paintings and the compositional echo of bodies lying on the ground.

House of the Fatal Loves.⁷⁴ The central paintings from Room E were removed to Naples upon excavation but fortunately preserved together; they depict the eponymous fatal loves. In one, Phaedra and her nurse read over a letter, presumably one relating to Phaedra's illicit love for her stepson Hippolytus (Figure 5.9).⁷⁵ In another, Paris propositions Helen, his intentions made clear by the Eros figure standing in a partially open doorway behind them (Figure 5.10).⁷⁶ In the third, Medea contemplates infanticide.⁷⁷ Like many mythological paintings from the Fourth Style, these have the look of theatrical scenes. Architectural forms set just behind the primary figures close off recession in space, and supernumerary figures, not part of the primary action, observe the scenes and model the act of viewing for the external audience, in so doing offering a link between the interior of the painting and the physical world of the house. Moreover, a plethora of framing devices both evoke a sense of the panel as an aperture onto another world and point toward the impossibility of the complete revelation of that world: doors partly opened, windows closed with curtains, balustrades over which spectators can barely glimpse. The emphasis on sight throughout the paintings indicates the close relationship between viewing and desire. The fact that, of the figures in these paintings, only Phaedra and the nurse might actually touch one another only reinforces the power of the gaze.

Beyond this, the paintings are linked thematically: they are all fatal loves, moments when the human inability to control desires that exceed the limits of social norms – the sexual desire for a close family member or for someone already married, or, in Medea's case, a desire for revenge so powerful and a renunciation of civilization so complete that it necessitates the murder of her own children – leads to the deepest tragedies. That these genuinely heartbreaking moments should appear in a domestic space can be puzzling. Bettina Bergmann has shown how the women in these paintings embody inversions of gender norms as well as the kinds of intense passions whose representation was also popular in contemporary poetry.⁷⁸ Such paintings may also serve as a stage for the safe experience of tragic emotions, an experience of catharsis worked out in the comparatively mundane confines of the private house.⁷⁹ This is one of the most powerful

⁷⁴ PPM 9.670–719, esp. 681–688; Brilliant 1984: 69–71; Bergmann 1996; Lorenz 2008: 422–427, 617; Bragantini and Sampaolo 2009: 238–241, no. 92–94; Newby 2016: 177–185.

⁷⁵ See e.g. Ov. *Her.* 4; Hodske 2007: 232, cat. 738; Lorenz 2008: 425–426.

⁷⁶ Hodske 2007: 191, cat. 736; Lorenz 2008: 230–232.

⁷⁷ Hodske 2007: 238, cat. 737; Lorenz 2008: 237–238; cf. Gutzwiller 2004; Vout 2012.

⁷⁸ Bergmann 1996: 208–210.

⁷⁹ Bergmann 1996: 211–213; cf. Buchanan 2012 on the representation of Medea's act of infanticide on Roman sarcophagi.



Figure 5.9 Phaedra and Nurse, Room E, House of Jason, Pompeii (IX.5.18), mid-first century CE.

functions of fiction, at least in the Aristotelian tradition: to permit the audience to experience pity, fear, and other emotions of extreme intensity without necessarily undergoing genuinely tragic events, and thus to purge themselves of those feelings, or, perhaps, to learn how to experience them in a socially permissible way.



Figure 5.10 Helen and Paris, Room E, House of Jason, Pompeii (IX.5.18), mid-first century CE.

The same, perhaps, could be said of the Cretan cycle at the Villa Imperiale, which is more obviously narratively connected but no less emotionally cathartic. The collection of myth permitted by the painting of painting, accordingly, may in this sense have been analogous to the production of poetic fiction itself, which can likewise link events over time within a narrative and thus inherently causal structure, but which also puts apparently unconnected themes and ideas into close juxtaposition. Ovid's

roughly contemporary *Metamorphoses* again provides a useful point of comparison: 15 books of poetry drawing on a huge repertoire of myth and on the history of the poetic transmission of that myth, which move ever forward in time and frequently cluster around mythic cycles like that of Minos' Crete, but which also occasionally diverge wildly from any clear causal or temporal connections between episodes. A set of paintings in a single room, or even within a house, cannot achieve the apparent inexhaustibility of the poet's *carmen perpetuum*, but in creating such evocative ensembles these examples point toward similar criteria of selection and presentation.

Collecting at the Villa della Farnesina

The painting of painting, in these ensembles, functions as the paradigmatic carrier of content, a powerfully flexible way of accumulating and juxtaposing the visual presentation of myth. But this was by no means the only paradigm, nor the only gesture toward collecting, that Roman meta-painting permitted. Not just myth but history, including the history of art, could drive compositional impulses. In the self-consciously art-historical collection of paintings of paintings within a mural scheme, Roman artists could explore the border between copy and paradigm, between historical distance and anachronism, between an object and its representation. They could explore, in other words, the very function and value of art in Roman society. A particularly complex example of such a collection appears at the Villa della Farnesina in Rome, which presents the densest and most focused assemblage of fictive painted panels in the extant material record, worked in a wide variety of formats and an equally impressive array of genres and historical styles. The murals from the villa give the impression of an encyclopedic picture gallery.⁸⁰ Yet for all its specificity, this is a collection composed with little evident reference to the masters immortalized in ancient art writing.

Two lines of interpretation follow from this point, each with a different temporal orientation. One envisions a linear and teleological model of time. It suggests that the fictive examples of the preceding centuries of Greek artistic production have been recast as notional *spolia* in a Roman

⁸⁰ Leach 1982: 162–164; 1988: 373–403; 2004: 137–140; Scheibler 1994: 32–33; Bergmann 1995: 102–107; Clarke 2005: 264–278; Hallett 2005: 433–435; Tanner 2006: 267–276; Wyler 2006; Mols and Moormann 2008: 69–77; Marvin 2008: 203–205; Platt 2009; Newby 2016: 140–143; Platt and Squire 2017b: 66–71; cf. Van Buren 1938.

domestic context. The term *spolia* is meant here both in its ancient martial sense as the spoils of war, to indicate that Greek art accrued to Rome at least in part through a process of conquest,⁸¹ and in its modern art-historical sense, to indicate the re-use of a pre-existing artistic material, form, or type.⁸² In both senses, access to *spolia* is a by-product of Rome's conquest of the Mediterranean, and the notional collection of the history of conquered cultures in Rome both glorifies and naturalizes the act of conquest and the imposition of empire.

The other line of interpretation is paradigmatic, and thus anachronic. This interpretation suggests that the murals of the Farnesina do not recapitulate the history of Greek painting merely to demonstrate Rome's dominance, but to participate paradigmatically in the storied tradition of the Greek panel. The apparent paradox of the anachronic staging of the history of painting is only one of a number of ironic subversions at play; the murals of the Farnesina also emphasize the materiality of panel painting without recourse to genuine materials, and they cast the Greek panel as object of both imitation and collection. They proclaim that the value of the painted panel is aesthetic, but not solely physical. In counterpoising a series of ironies such as these, the Farnesina murals sketch both the rubric for, and the limits of, fiction in Roman art.

Built on the right bank of the Tiber, likely during the early Augustan period, and perhaps even for a member of Augustus' own family, the villa was richly decorated with murals which abound with representations of panel painting.⁸³ Such depictions appear in the cryptoporticus (A), where fictive panels are set within a portico structure. The panels, of which fifteen survive, appear to be appended to or embedded in a backing wall above a narrow stage supporting ornately decorated, green, fluted columns. Landscape vistas, including naval scenes, appear to be painted directly on the white surface of the backing wall. The fictive panels are square, clearly demarcated with beveled frames, and depict one or two figures set against largely unarticulated backgrounds. They show both Dionysiac scenes and figures from the history of philosophy. Four are worked in an obviously different style from the others; Irene Bragantini and Mariette de Vos have suggested that they were restored in

⁸¹ Pape 1975; Miles 2008: 13–104. ⁸² Brilliant 1982; Brilliant and Kinney 2011.

⁸³ The bibliography on the villa is substantial. Beyond the scholarship focusing on the picture-gallery like aspect see especially Bragantini and De Vos 1982; Moorman 1988: 233–236; Sanzi di Mino and Bragantini 1998; Mols and Moormann 2008; cf. Mau 1882a; 1884; Lessing and Mau 1891; Brendel 1935; Lugli 1938; Beyen 1948; Andreae 1969; Mielsch 1975: 20–26, 111–114; Galinsky 1996: 183–197; Clarke 1998: 91–107; Krause 2000; Grüner 2004: 165–284; La Rocca 2008a; Valladares 2012.

antiquity.⁸⁴ In corridor F–G, by contrast, small panel-like scenes, whose subjects alternate between sacro-idyllic landscapes and still lifes with dramatic masks, sit above the level of the cornice of a painted portico, unframed but separated by thinly attenuated pillars decorated with caryatid-like figures.⁸⁵

The decorative schemes of the villa's three surviving *cubicula* are particularly striking in the rich variety of fictive painted panels incorporated into complex architectural illusions. Of these, *cubicula* B⁸⁶ and D⁸⁷ form a coherent pair, although the paintings in B are better preserved. They flanked the *triclinium* (C) and opened directly onto the garden of the villa.⁸⁸ The long walls lining the antechambers of both *cubicula* display a version of the stage-front scheme. On the left wall of *cubiculum* B (Plate 14), above a multi-colored dado, a narrow green stage projects from a deep red backing wall; white fluted columns rise from podia, themselves projecting out from the stage, to support a narrow architrave. Under the architrave the backing wall is separated into two registers by a simple white cornice. The alcove walls of B share the same dado, stage, and backing wall as the antechamber walls. But the rear wall of the alcove, by contrast, is articulated into a more centralized and compact composition of an *aedicula* supported by columns rising from a projection of the stage (Plate 15).

The vibrant red of the backing walls dominates both rooms, but that strong color is offset by an exceptionally dense proliferation of architectural details, fictive panels, and sculptures such as the lifelike candelabra in the form of the Egyptian deities Isis and Zeus Ammon, which are each executed in their own distinctive palettes. The paintings play with the normal conventions of projection and recession in space. Although the columns throughout the rooms rest on podia that project from the narrow stage, for instance, they also appear to be engaged into the backing wall and cast thin shadows onto its surface. Figures rendered in light and shadow as though fully three-dimensional, such as the Isis candelabrum growing from a lotus flower on the long wall of *cubiculum* B, seem to occupy

⁸⁴ Bragantini and De Vos 1982: 77.

⁸⁵ Bragantini and De Vos 1982: 337–377; Moorman 1988: 235; Sanzi di Mino and Bragantini 1998: 114–123; Mols and Moormann 2008: 50–53.

⁸⁶ Bragantini and De Vos 1982: 128–187; Moormann 1988: 233–234; Sanzi di Mino and Bragantini 1998: 56–93; Mols and Moormann 2008: 21–30.

⁸⁷ Bragantini and De Vos 1982: 188–233; Moorman 1988: 234; Sanzi di Mino and Bragantini 1998: 56–93; Mols and Moormann 2008: 30–37.

⁸⁸ Bragantini and De Vos 1982: 234–283; Moorman 1988: 234–235; Sanzi di Mino and Bragantini 1998: 46–55; Mols and Moormann 2008: 37–44.

multiple depth intervals, or to have no clear spatial location at all. The Isis figure evokes one of Vitruvius' *monstra* (*De. arch.* 7.5.3); a hybrid, impossible creation whose existence both enlivens the room's composition through its virtuosic handling and exotic subject and at the same time calls into question the illusion of the room's architectural decoration by drawing attention to its merely fictional status.⁸⁹

The role of these candelabra in the room's decorative program is further clarified by the siren figures holding the square, white-ground panel paintings on the back alcove wall of the same room. Their torsos are vibrantly lifelike, but at the waist they transition into marble, claw-footed bases that rest on top of the wall's narrow stage. Here too, as Stephanie Wyler and Verity Platt have noted, the impossibility of the figure lies not merely in its hybridity, but in its violation of spatial order.⁹⁰ The panels themselves seem to hang on the backing wall, but the sirens clearly sit some distance in front of that wall, a shift between depth intervals that has been fully elided by the artist. Both the candelabra figures and the siren bases highlight the artificiality of the room's late Second Style perspectival immersion. Yet both also differ from the fictive panels spread throughout the room in that they do not disrupt the mural illusion by offering an alternate plane of representation. This act of disruption is one of the primary means by which the fictive panel is marked out as an object of collection.

The fictive panels of the Farnesina also suggest a deliberately assembled collection through their seemingly encyclopedic variety. In format, genre, and historical style, these fictive paintings display both a remarkable heterogeneity and an apparent sense of completeness. Both of these traits are suggestive of a collection, a body of objects assembled for "symbolic rather than practical needs."⁹¹ In *cubiculum* B, sitting on the cornice of the left-hand wall, is a shuttered panel with an erotic scene (not visible in the photograph). Just to the right of the shuttered panel, likewise above the cornice, is a simple octagonal panel with a double beveled frame, showing three figures against a black background, a likely candidate for the designation *pinax athurōtos*, or panel without shutters.⁹² It is paired by a similar panel just on the other side of the large central panel on the wall. The central panel, a *pinax emblētos*, is a large, vertically oriented and arcuated white ground showing Aphrodite enthroned, attended by

⁸⁹ On which see e.g. Sauron 1990; Yerkes 2000; Tybout 2001; Hallett 2001; Grüner 2004: 218–284; Leach 2004: 140–142; Nichols 2017: 130–162.

⁹⁰ Wyler 2006; Platt 2009. ⁹¹ Bounia 2004: 1. ⁹² Bragantini and De Vos 1982: 130.

a handmaid and Eros figure.⁹³ On the rear alcove wall of the room is yet another embedded panel under an *aedicula*, with the infant Dionysus nursed by the nymphs of Nyssa, flanked by the framed white-ground panels held by the siren-bases. Beyond *cubiculum* B are yet further examples of formats of panels known from the Delian inventories. Particularly striking are the stucco panels that decorated vaults throughout the house, perhaps corresponding to the designation of a ceiling panel, or *pinax orophikos*.

The number and variety of painted panels is not limited to the formats of those paintings, that is to the shape, material support, and method of display; it extends to the genres depicted. In *cubiculum* B alone, six distinct genres, or categories of subject matter, are identifiable. These include the erotic scene of the shuttered panel, the non-specific mythological scenes of the central panel the small octagonal panels on the long wall, the specific mythological scene of the infant Dionysus nursed by nymphs on the alcove wall and its accompanying genre scenes of musicians. But they also include, in the ceiling stuccoes, complex sacral-idyllic landscapes and a scene of initiation into the Dionysiac mysteries, in which a Silen is about to unveil the mystical phallus before three initiates.⁹⁴ This aspect of the Farnesina collection highlights the super-generic capacity of the fictive panel, its ability to adumbrate a strikingly wide range of figural and landscape scenes, and to incorporate those scenes within the architectural syntax of Roman domestic decoration.

Perhaps even more striking is the variety and specificity of stylistic reference in the Farnesina collection. The wide variety of styles on display within the fictive panels has long been recognized.⁹⁵ It is often noted, for instance, that the white-ground paintings of *cubicula* B and D resemble fifth-century white-ground vases from Athens, and that in contrast, the scene of the infant Dionysus employs a coloristic technique only developed in the Hellenistic period. Yet these assertions are often very general in nature. In one of the few attempts to identify precisely the stylistic references of the paintings, Bernard Andreae suggested a parallel between the seated maiden holding an *alabastron* shown on a small rectangular white-ground panel in *cubiculum* E and the work of the fifth-century Athenian

⁹³ Bragantini and De Vos 1982: 130–131.

⁹⁴ For analysis of the subject matter in the Farnesina paintings see especially Clarke 1998: 91–107; Wyler 2006; Valladares 2012.

⁹⁵ Bragantini and De Vos 1982: 128–139; Bergmann 1995: 103–104; Leach 2004: 127–129; Hallett 2005: 433; Wyler 2006: 218–221; Tanner 2006: 268–269; Mols and Moormann 2008: 71–72; Rouveret 2015: 120–121.



Figure 5.11 Detail of white-ground panel with Zeus, *Cubiculum D*, Villa della Farnesina, Rome, late first century BCE.

Lykaon Painter.⁹⁶ But there are further, more precise points of stylistic reference within the panels of *cubicula B* and *D*.

The earliest appears in *cubiculum D*, on the left-hand wall, near the door. In a small, rectangular white-ground panel demarcated by a delicately rendered double-frame, is a depiction of a figure of Zeus, standing in contrapposto, leaning on a tall, thin staff (Figure 5.11). The figure is worked entirely in outline drawing, delineated by thin and delicate but sure lines. The brushstrokes are long and confident. No monumental painting has survived that matches this figure. The record of Attic white-ground vase painting offers striking comparisons, however, and though we might question the utility of comparing Roman wall paintings with Attic white-ground vases,⁹⁷ most of which were intended for a funerary uses,⁹⁸ it

⁹⁶ Andrae 1969: 439. ⁹⁷ Mols and Moormann 2008: 71. ⁹⁸ Oakley 2004.



Figure 5.12 White-ground bobbin by the Penthesilea Painter, mid-fifth century BCE.

would be strange if the style of drawing on such ceramics were not similar to that of panels and wall paintings in fifth-century Athens.⁹⁹ The Farnesina figure appears to have been rendered in a style of drawing popular in Athens during the second quarter of the fifth century BCE, as evinced by a white-ground bobbin attributed to the Penthesilea Painter, and dated to between 460 and 450 BCE (Figure 5.12).¹⁰⁰ The pertinent figure, a youth pursued by Eros, is to the right on side A of the disk. The two figures are not identical: the Farnesina Zeus is shown as a mature, fully bearded man rather than a youth, and, as the Penthesilea Painter employed a viscous dilute glaze wash for the outline of the figures, the sureness and roundness of line were somewhat limited.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Koch-Brinkmann 1999.

¹⁰⁰ ARV² 890.175; cf. Robertson 1992: 165; Picón and De Puma 2007: 122, no. 134.

¹⁰¹ Cohen 2006: 220–221.



Figure 5.13 Detail of fictive panel with musicians, *Cubiculum* B, Villa della Farnesina, Rome, late first century BCE.

Yet in their poses, the composition of their bodies, and in the handling of line they are strikingly similar. It is worth paying attention to the rendering of the muscles in each figure, and to the outward turned proper left leg, with the tendons behind the knee indicated by two simple strokes. The parallels between each figure's long, curly locks of hair over his shoulders are similarly striking. The two figures are not worked in the exact same style, as the hands and eyes of the Farnesina figure reveal its comparative belatedness, but the reference that figure makes to early Classical painting seems clear.

A number of other stylistic references occur. The leftmost of the two white-ground panels on the rear alcove wall of *cubiculum* B (Figure 5.13), for example, seems to evoke a slightly later style, embodied by a white-ground *lekythos* attributed to the early phase of the Achilles Painter's career

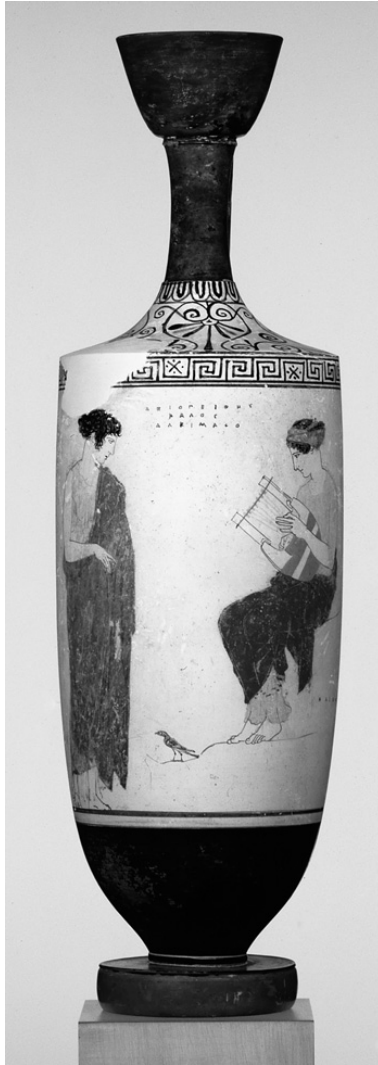


Figure 5.14 White-ground lekythos, attributed to the Achilles Painter, mid-fifth century BCE.

(ca.450–440), generally interpreted as two muses on Mount Helicon (Figure 5.14).¹⁰² In both scenes, the standing figure on the left tilts her head, cocks her wrist, and extends her right hand at precisely the same angle. In both, the musician seated to the right of the scene splays out fingers across the strings of the instrument. Even the facial profiles echo each other, as does the fall of drapery on the mantles of the standing figures.

¹⁰² ARV² 997.155; cf. Robertson 1992: 201; Oakley 1997: 142, no. 209, pl. 2; 2004: 96–97.

Although the traditional date for the vase by the Achilles Painter is just a decade later than the bobbin by the Penthesilea Painter, the stylistic differences are pronounced. Both are worked in outline, and though the Achilles Painter's figures are less dynamically posed, the handling of line is surer, the softness of contour more delicate. It seems certain that the painters of the Farnesina workshop could not have known the compositions on these specific vessels, but they must have been familiar with the stylistic developments that occurred during the fifth century. And while it may seem scarcely credible that a Roman viewer could distinguish among individual decades in the history of Classical painting, just such a careful connoisseurial sensibility appears to be at play.

Less precise historical connections can be established for the large embedded panels in *cubiculum* B. The scene of Aphrodite enthroned on the long wall relates generally to high Classical painting. For the profile of the figure's faces, we might compare another vase from the Achilles Painter's corpus dating to a slightly later stage in his career, *ca.*440–430 BCE.¹⁰³ And, despite the differences in the handling of color, another parallel is provided by the paintings from the Thracian tomb at Kazanlak. This is evident especially in the roundness of the figure's limbs and the light shading inside the contour lines to emphasize volume – apparent on the back of the Eros figure at the Farnesina and below the right elbow of the enthroned woman at Kazanlak.¹⁰⁴ The handling of the throne in which that woman sits in the Kazanlak tomb, moreover, echoes that of the throne of Aphrodite at the Farnesina. The Thracian paintings are normally dated to the end of the fourth century BCE, much later than the Athenian example. But they were produced on the periphery of the Greek-speaking world, and, as J.J. Pollitt has suggested, their style may be reflective of that of earlier generations of artistic practice in Attica.¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, it may be the case that the large Farnesina scene points more precisely toward later fifth-century painting than we are now able to establish. Similarly, the large Dionysus panel on the alcove wall seems to refer to early Hellenistic painting, although we cannot place its reference with any certainty. The foreshortening, strong handling of color and light, and the precision of modeling appear in the archaeological record in the later fourth century, in such examples as the stag-hunt pebble mosaic signed by Gnosis from Pella.¹⁰⁶ The complex layering of depth intervals, presence of supernumerary figures in the background, and powerful

¹⁰³ Athens NAM 1818; ARV² 998.161; cf. Oakley 1997: 144, 218; pl. 114; 2004: 64–65.

¹⁰⁴ Zhivkova 1975; Torelli 2001. ¹⁰⁵ Pollitt 1986: 190–191; cf. Torelli 2001: 156.

¹⁰⁶ Salzmann 1982: 28–30; Pollitt 1986: 41–42; Dunbabin 1999: 10–17.

emotional content, further, evoke paintings like the stele of Hediste, perhaps produced in the later third century BCE.¹⁰⁷

Greece, of course, was not the only touchstone for stylistic reference in these paintings; Egyptian motifs proliferate both at the Farnesina and throughout first-century BCE painting in Rome. At the Farnesina these Egyptian (at least pharaonic) references are primarily iconographic rather than stylistic, but in the slightly later paintings of the House of the Orchard in Pompeii (I.9.5), for example, Egyptian style seems to have become the object of outright reflection (Figure 5.15). Here we see, above a low black dado and a lattice-work fence and framed by a kind of attenuated peristyle, a lush garden punctuated by living birds and representations of works of art.¹⁰⁸ On the rear wall, set behind the fence to the left and right of the composition are Egyptianizing statues on bases. They are heavily worn, but comparison with the right wall of the room indicates that they would have been vibrantly painted. In the middle of the wall, enclosed in a multi-tiered frame, is a polychrome scene, perhaps imitating a painted marble relief, of two wreathed figures, one standing and one reclining, perhaps Dionysus and Ariadne. Above the architrave of the peristyle, resting on short bases themselves, are two further painted panels. These appear to represent painted marble surfaces, and their materiality is highlighted by the birds standing and alighting on their upper edges; the fictionality of the scene as a whole is reinforced by the dramatic mask hanging from the ceiling. They are rendered in a strikingly different style to the polychrome scene of Dionysus, one which accords much more closely with their Egyptianizing themes, derived from offering scenes in pharaonic funerary art.

Jaś Elsner has shown that style and content operate in close tandem here, and has suggested that an Egyptianizing style, in effect, could occupy much the same position as any other Roman classicism, understood as a deliberate archaism or reference to a pre-existing artistic tradition.¹⁰⁹ But in the case of the Farnesina we might think rather that style is content, that it is precisely the collection of a variety of styles developed over a long span of the history of Mediterranean art that constitutes the primary interest of painter and patron. That these styles are re-capitulated within the immersive framework of the Roman mural, whether garden painting, as in the House of the Orchard, or architectural illusion, as at the Farnesina, only reinforces the point. The history of painting, presented metonymically

¹⁰⁷ Pollitt 1986: 4–5; Rouveret 1989: 202–203; Scheibler 1994: 133–134; Salowey 2012: 251–255; cf. Miller 2014.

¹⁰⁸ *PPM* 2.1–137, esp. 15–35; De Vos 1980: 15–21; Moormann 1988: 151.

¹⁰⁹ Elsner 2006: 278–284; cf. Swetnam Burland 2015: 53–63.



Figure 5.15 Room 5, House of the Orchard, Pompeii (1.9.5), early to mid-first century CE.

through stylistic difference, is subsumed to contemporary mural production. But subsumed to what end?

Collecting in the Hellenistic Mediterranean

The conceit presented by the murals of the Farnesina is that of a collection of pictures, or *pinacotheca*. This seems, initially, to be nothing more than

a conceit, an aspect of the paintings' fiction, but assemblages of mythological panels in Roman mural paintings may have been understood as *pinacothecae* in antiquity.¹¹⁰ Of particular interest is Petronius' description of a picture gallery in the *Satyricon*, an episode featuring two of the few surviving uses of the word in Latin, in which the narrator wanders into a room decorated with paintings by the great Greek masters (83.1):

I came into a marvelous picture gallery with many kinds of panels. There I both saw those by the hand of Zeuxis, not yet conquered by the injury of age, and I took in, not without some hair-raising awe, the rough sketches of Protogenes, which vie with the truth of nature itself. But when I came upon the Apelles, which the Greeks call the "One-legged," I adored it especially.¹¹¹

Given the circumstances of the episode, it seems unlikely that works of three of the most famous painters in the ancient world should be collected in this single room. What Petronius' narrator Encolpius really describes in this scene, accordingly, may not be a genuine picture gallery hung with independent panel paintings executed by Zeuxis, Protogenes, and Apelles, but rather a mural, fictive gallery in which the works of those masters are evoked.¹¹² The episode takes place within the frame of satire, of course, but even if the idea of the *pinacotheca* only appears here ironically, it would speak to one motivation underlying the painting of painting in Rome: its ability to collect in a single location the kinds of paintings that the most distinguished historical Greek artists had produced.¹¹³

Our knowledge of ancient art collecting is fragmentary, but a wide variety of sources demonstrate the importance of assemblages of art objects across contexts and for many different kinds of viewers.¹¹⁴ The Hellenistic poet Herodas' fourth *mimiamb*, for example, follows ostensibly naive viewers through a collection of statues and paintings in a temple of Asclepius on Cos but deploys sophisticated aesthetic

¹¹⁰ Schefold 1952: 32–34; 1972: 50–52; cf. Ghedini and Salvo 2015; Newby 2016: 137–163.

¹¹¹ *In pinacothecam perveni vario genere tabularum mirabilem. Nam et Zeuxidos manus vidi nondum vetustatis iniuria victas, et Protogenis rudimenta cum ipsius naturae veritate certantia non sine quodam horrore tractavi. Iam vero Apellis quam Graeci μονόκνημον appellant, etiam adoravi.* Text from and translation adapted from the Loeb edition of Heseltine, Rouse, and Warmington 1987: 192–193.

¹¹² Or, perhaps, Encolpius' attributions of the paintings to these artists are made in error. Cf. *DNO* nos. 1765, 2935, 3022. For mistaken, and corrected, attributions of works of art to historical Greek artists, see e.g. Mart. 9.44; Lucian *Philops.* 18.

¹¹³ See e.g. Elsner 2007: 177–199; cf. e.g. Slater 1990: 222, no. 15; Baier 2010; Dufallo 2013: 177–205; Rouveret 2015: 113–114.

¹¹⁴ For ancient collecting practices, see e.g. Alsop 1982: esp. 170–211; Haug 2001; Bounia 2004; Tanner 2006: 264–275; Miles 2008: esp. 218–284; Platt 2010; Bravi 2012; Rutledge 2012, Gahtan and Pegazzano 2015.

terminology.¹¹⁵ Posidippus' epigrams often purport to describe finely worked objects and often play upon overtly art-historical themes, especially in the poems on statues, the *Andriantopoiika*.¹¹⁶ During the high Empire, a text like Lucian's *Philopseudes* (18) discussed a collection of statues in an aristocratic house,¹¹⁷ and both the elder and younger Philostratus produced collections of descriptions of paintings.¹¹⁸ In so doing they both explored criteria for aesthetic evaluation and played in exceptionally sophisticated ways on the similarities and differences between the visual and verbal arts. The groups of poems known as the Garlands of Philip and Meleager, which would ultimately come to form the core of the *Greek Anthology*, not only self-consciously present themselves as collections of poetry, but are also filled with dedicatory and ekphrastic epigrams whose internal arrangement is often meaningful.¹¹⁹

The purposes served by art collections, as seen through such poems, could vary widely. So too could the actual structure of collections, which might be put together under differing circumstances and organized according to any number of principles, but which are often remarkably heterogeneous in composition. A passage of Athenaeus, quoting the second-century BCE author Callexenus of Rhodes (*Deip.* 5. 196a–197d), describes a festival pavilion erected by Ptolemy II, offering not just an enumeration of the ways in which the early Ptolemies could display their staggering wealth but also a litany of the kinds of art objects most valued in the Hellenistic Mediterranean.¹²⁰ Athenaeus notes at one point that the decorations of the pavilion included such luxury items as tapestries, painted panels, a hundred marble figures, paintings by the artists of the Sikyonian school, portraits, garments of cloth and gold, and military cloaks with figures woven in them – some portraits of kings, others mythological subjects. And he continues in the next section, listing silver and gold shields, life-size figures from comedy, Delphic tripods of gold, golden eagles, 100 couches with feet shaped like Sphinxes, purple rugs,

¹¹⁵ See e.g. Skinner 2001; cf. Goldhill 1994: 216–223.

¹¹⁶ Austin and Bastianini 2002: 84–93 nos. 62–70; cf. e.g. Zanker 2003; Acosta-Hughes, Kosmetatu, and Baumbach 2004; Gutzwiller 2005; Prioux 2007; Prioux 2008: 159–252; Porter 2010b: 481–490; 2011.

¹¹⁷ Many of which may be copies. See e.g. Ogden 2007: 137–159. On Lucian's treatment of art elsewhere see Maffei 1994; Newby 2002; Elsner 2007: 58–62.

¹¹⁸ On these strategies in the elder Philostratus see e.g.: Elsner 2000; Giuliani 2006; Newby 2009; Baumann 2011; Squire 2013a; Bachmann 2015. On Philostratus the Younger: Ghedini, Colpo, and Novello 2004; Squire 2013b: 164–165.

¹¹⁹ See e.g. Gow and Page 1965; 1968; Cameron 1993; Gutzwiller 1998; Argentieri 2007; Krevans 2007; Squire 2010a; 2010c.

¹²⁰ See e.g. Rice 1983; Coarelli 1996a; Calandra 2011.

carpets with figures woven into them, 200 tables of gold, 100 silver basins, an equal number of pitchers, and more gem-studded goblets and vessels, weighing in total 10,000 silver talents. Beyond its sheer opulence, perhaps the most striking aspect of the description of the pavilion is its variety. That heterogeneity, in fact, may have underlain the very purpose of the pavilion: to delight, even to overwhelm. If such a structure ever existed, not only would it have been visually staggering to enter, but the smells of the various flowers strewn over the floor and the tastes and sounds of the banquet would have taken over all the senses.

If the desire to over-stimulate provided one of the organizational principles of Ptolemy's assemblage, then the motivation for the pavilion's collection would seem to be largely instrumental, and the specifics of that collection itself only secondary. Yet the principle of variety evident at Ptolemy's pavilion appears again and again. It marks Cicero's discussion of the collection of artworks furtively amassed by Gaius Verres during his governorship of Sicily (Cic. *Verr.* 2.4.1), where we find the obsessive drive, indeed the pathology, which for Walter Benjamin would come to mark the true collector.¹²¹ And it runs throughout the Delian inventories, whose purpose was, above all, to record the cumulative interactions between human and divine that a votive offering represents, and which, accordingly, give relatively little precedence or pride of place to works of art over any other dedicated object.¹²²

The image of variety in collecting practices presented by these literary sources is further corroborated by the archaeological record of a shipwreck found in 1901 off the coast of Antikythera and still being excavated today.¹²³ The ship, which most likely capsized between 75 and 50 BCE, was carrying a cargo of luxury items; it has been hypothesized that it was destined to outfit a suburban garden of a Roman aristocrat – in other words, that it was meant to function as a collection.¹²⁴ If so, it presents a remarkable parallel to the picture Cicero gives of Verres' collection. The ship, which had probably last departed Delos en route to Rome, carried material from around the Mediterranean basin. That material was worked into a wide array of art and luxury items, produced over a long span of time. It included statues in bronze and marble, jewelry, bronze and wood couch fittings, glass mosaic bowls, all kinds of ceramic

¹²¹ Benjamin 2007: 60.

¹²² On the kinds of collections represented by temple inventories, see e.g. Higbie 2003; Bounia 2004: 84–101; Shaya 2005; Platt 2010; Shaya 2015.

¹²³ Bol 1972; Kaltsas, Vlachogianni, and Bouyia 2012; cf. Hellenkemper Salies 1994; Fulton 2016.

¹²⁴ Kaltsas, Vlachogianni, and Bouyia 2012: 15.

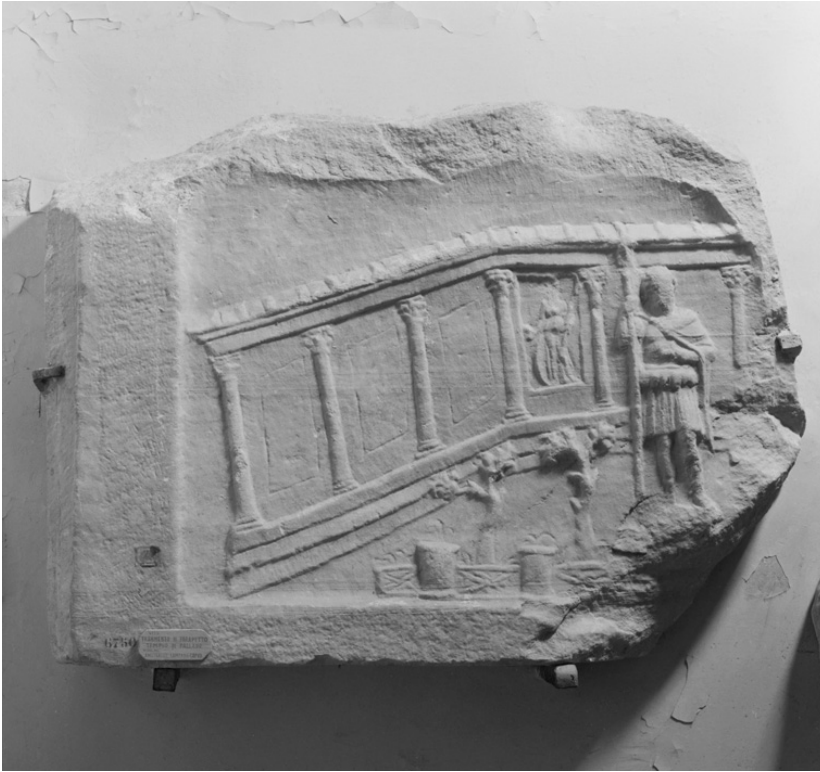


Figure 5.16 Relief plaque with portico, from Capua, first century BCE.

vessels, and the so-called Antikythera Mechanism, a complex astronomical and calendrical calculator likely produced in the second half of the first century BCE.

Relatively little evidence has survived for the specific organization and display of collections of paintings as such in Rome. Pliny, for example, often lists the locations of the works of art he discusses, but rarely mentions how the viewer might physically have encountered them. The Augustan art assemblages discussed in [Chapter 3](#) typically formed only a part of a larger program of public building projects, but even so they also reinforce the picture of variety of form and content in collecting practice. Physical remains give the same impression. A fragment of a relief sculpture from Capua seems to show the interior of a public portico, perhaps like the one that ran behind the Theater of Pompey, marked by a wide variety of internal decoration ([Figure 5.16](#)). A large honorific portrait of a man holding a spear and wearing military dress dominates the inner space; next to him we see

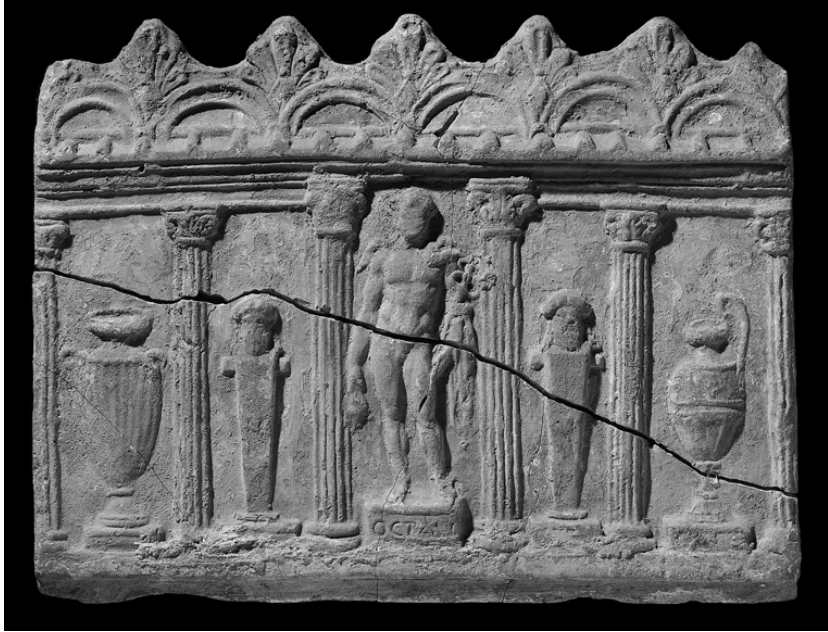


Figure 5.17 Terracotta plaque with portico, first century CE.

a low fence, altars, and trees.¹²⁵ The inclusion of the latter is significant; the flora captured the attention of visitors to Pompey's portico as much as the works of art.¹²⁶ Around the edges of the plaque runs the interior of a colonnade, with freestanding Corinthian columns resting on a stylobate supported by two low steps. Set into the wall of the portico behind the colonnade is a now-damaged representation of a female figure, likely a deity, holding a scepter or staff in her left hand and another heavily effaced object in her right. The figure is clearly framed within a recessed rectangular panel; whether we are meant to interpret her as a freestanding statue inside a niche, a relief sculpture, or perhaps even a painting, is unclear. Three further rectangles running along the left side of the colonnade, incised but not cut away in relief, are perhaps meant to indicate paintings, which would suggest that the figure is indeed sculptural. A terracotta plaque now in Boston also shows the interior of a colonnade, perhaps a representation of the less politicized context of the gymnasium (Figure 5.17).¹²⁷

Again, however, variety dominates. In the center of the colonnade stands a large statue of Mercury, complete with caduceus and moneybag, on an

¹²⁵ Zanker 1988: 19. ¹²⁶ Kuttner 1999. ¹²⁷ Hallett 2015: 17–18.

elevated base. To either side of the statue are herms, heavily worn but seemingly depicting Dionysus, and on the far edges are tall, elaborately made vessels, one approximating the form of an amphora and the other a hydria. Style seems to play a key function here. In contrapposto stance, proportions, and modeling of muscles, the statue of Mercury evokes Classical fifth-century antecedents, perhaps even a statue of Hermes attributed to Polykleitos.¹²⁸ The herms, by contrast, gesture toward Archaic statuary, at least insofar as their style is legible from the current state of the plaque. Both conceptually and visually, the statue of the god dominates the scene, but its iconographic significance and stylistic bravura are set off precisely by contrast with the colonnade's other decorative elements.¹²⁹ Furthermore, the fact that the base on which the statue stands is labeled in Latin would appear to drive home that these art-historical references have been subsumed within an explicitly Roman system for the display and consumption of art.

The Politics of Time

All collections seek to manipulate time, to bring past and present into a new and previously unforeseen relationship. In Roman collections of fictive paintings, especially at the Farnesina, these temporal manipulations appear to have had two valences, one linearly teleological, and the other fundamentally anachronic. Such valences need not have been mutually exclusive. A number of apparently competing models of time circulated in the ancient world.¹³⁰ Some were linear, others cyclical, and yet others still more mutable. As Dennis Feeney in particular has noted, in the late Republic the Roman sense of time was challenged both by the desire to integrate into the time-world of Greece, occasioned by cultural exchange even more than conquest, and the calendrical reforms of Julius Caesar in 46.¹³¹ The issues hinged in part on the relationship of historical

¹²⁸ Plin. *HN* 34.56; cf. e.g. *DNO* no. 1226; Matheson 1983. For skepticism that we can identify a Polykleitan Hermes type see Marvin 1997; 2008: 151–164.

¹²⁹ Other, similar terracotta reliefs in Boston expand on this heterogeneity of object type and style. One, MFA 03.882, features a colonnade lined with tall vases, a statue of a boxer set on a low base, two herms, and an *oscilla* and a *pelta* hanging from the architrave of the colonnade. Another, MFA 03.883, which even displays architectural sculpture in a pediment above a colonnade, displays five statues: two boxers, a figure of Herakles (larger than the others, and set on a taller base), an athlete apparently cleaning a *strigil*, and a victorious youth.

¹³⁰ Hannah 2009.

¹³¹ Feeney 2007; cf. e.g. Newlands 1995. For a cross-cultural perspective on the mutability of time see Gell 1992.

to mythical time, and on the relationships between natural and civic time. Multiple models could be adopted to navigate these relationships, and temporal orientation, accordingly, could be flexible. Peter Holliday, similarly, has allied Roman exemplary or typological thinking to both teleological and cyclical models of time in the creation of the Ara Pacis Augustae, where contemporary events, the mythic origins of history, and the yearly repetition of religious performance all operated symbiotically.¹³² In other words, multiple temporalities need not have been mutually exclusive.

One interpretation of the Roman collection of fictive painting depends upon an essentially linear sense of time. It views the progression of styles in the history of art as a series of discrete moments in time leading up to the present: Severe style drawing yields to that of the Classical style, which eventually yields to a Hellenistic colorism, which itself yields, ultimately, to a Roman mural style that makes room for, and encompasses, its predecessors. This teleological view is supported by linear, progressivist art-historical assertions such as those of Cicero, who characterizes changes in artistic style over time by asserting that nothing is at the same time created and perfected (Cic. *Brut.* 70), or of Quintilian, who says that those who prefer the crude fifth-century paintings of Polygnotos to the refined work of the late fourth century BCE do so only out of pretension, rather than as a matter of genuine taste (*Inst. Orat.* 12.10.3). A temporally linear interpretation of the visual acts of art history performed in the Farnesina murals is also, ultimately, a political interpretation of those murals. It asserts that the succession of individual styles of Greek painting leads up to, and culminates in, the Romanness of the mural's Second Style conceit not only because the Roman succeeds the Greek temporally, but because it includes the Greek politically. Through the act of conquest, Rome has become not only the cultural heir of Greece, but also its overlord. This political status is reflected in and plays out in part through the visual arts.

The acquisition and display of Greek artworks continued to carry connotations of conquest into the first century CE and beyond; one of the primary rubrics by which such works were understood was as the rightful products of war brought to Rome by victorious generals. According to an anecdote related by Pliny, it was only through an auction connected to the total destruction of the city of Corinth that Lucius Mummius Achaicus, and eventually the Roman populace, became aware of the true value of

¹³² Holliday 1990.

panel painting (*HN* 35.24; cf. 35.100). And Cicero asserts, in his prosecution of Verres, that foreigners would venerate works erected in Rome that had been taken from their original locations through the act of conquest (*Verr.* 2.4.51). The implication was not just that the Romans had a legal right to artworks obtained through conquest, but that spoliation was one of the primary ways in which they thought about Greek art.

Under this reading, the Greek panel paintings visible in the Farnesina murals serve as *spolia*, albeit notional rather than actual, and thus as visual testaments to the Roman conquest of the Mediterranean, which, by being subsumed to the decorative scheme of a Roman domestic context, testify to the moral and historical justness of Roman rule.¹³³ These panels were fictions, rather than physical objects that could be taken from one place to another, but they may have connoted conquest as strongly as their physical counterparts.¹³⁴ In the relation of object to setting – Greek panel in Roman mural – the Farnesina murals preserve the structure of the principle act of spoliation. They displace the Greek and re-contextualize it within the Roman, even if they were not physically transported to Rome as the spoils of war. The apparent encyclopedism of notional *spolia*, the varied completeness of the collection of fictive panels here, would seem to reinforce this view.¹³⁵ It would suggest that the murals comprise a holistic, all-encompassing locus of collection and display devised as a testament of Roman triumphalism because the fictive paintings add up to a comprehensive totality, a kind of small-scale metaphor for the empire itself.¹³⁶

Under the temporally linear, political reading of the Farnesina murals, the paintings assemble and focus the history of Greek panel painting for essentially ideological purposes, as an erudite stage for the presentation of

¹³³ For the art-historical conceptualization of spoliation as the re-use of pre-existing artistic materials and forms see e.g. Esch 1969; Brilliant 1982; Kinney 1998; Hansen 2003; Brilliant and Kinney 2011; cf. Nagel and Wood 2010: 175–184; Liverani 2011.

¹³⁴ Bettina Bergmann and Stephanie Wyler, for example, have asserted that the stylistic and iconographic references made by the Farnesina murals would have been coded to a contemporary Roman audience as Greek, and that their accumulation in the one place would have created the dual effect of cultured, exotic otherness and a familiar sense of the totalizing drive of Augustan Imperialism. Bergmann 1995: 102–105; Wyler 2006: 213–232. Miranda Marvin has proposed a similar reading, but also points out the contrast between the Greek content of the fictive panels and the references to Egypt in the painted architecture. Marvin 2008: 202–205.

¹³⁵ On the appropriative encyclopedism of Roman sculptural collections see e.g. Neudecker 2015; cf. 1988; 1998.

¹³⁶ Pliny draws clear connections between the collection of Greek art in Rome and the narrative of Roman expansion: through conquest the material history of the world can be collected in Rome itself. See Rouveret 1987b; Carey 2003; Murphy 2004; Beagan 2013.

notional *spolia*, the representation of the art-historical results of Roman conquest. Bergmann asserts: “Whoever owned art, whether in original or simulation, became synonymous with who owned the past.”¹³⁷ This interpretation yields a close parallel between the private function of art and its public uses, as in the Forum of Augustus, where architecture, architectural sculpture, newly produced statues, and much older statues and paintings were all marshaled to communicate a unified message of Augustan triumph.

The forum, vowed by Augustus not long after the death of Caesar, was inaugurated in 2 BCE.¹³⁸ It served the necessary purpose of alleviating congestion in the Republican Forum and the Forum of Caesar by providing new spaces for trials, speeches, and other activities, but also served to implement, on a huge scale, a coherent artistic program supporting a distinctly triumphalist Augustan message. The forum was a largely rectangular space with semicircular exedras, probably two along each aisle, and the temple of Mars Ultor in the back.¹³⁹ Caryatids and the clipeate images of Jupiter Ammon and other gods decorated the upper part of the porticoes; the porticoes were lined with statues of significant men from the mythology and history of Rome. The ancestors of the Julian family and the kings of Alba Longa were placed on the north, centered around a group showing Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius fleeing Troy. On the south the *summi viri*, or great men from the history of Rome, surrounded Romulus with the *spolia opima*. In typically Augustan fashion, then, the image program attempts to reconcile both a statement of monarchic intent and a gesture of respect for the history of the Roman Republic.

These statues and the program they formed, evidently, were contemporary commissions. Yet the Forum also contained esteemed works of Greek art. In the Temple of Mars Ultor, there was an ivory statue of Athena Alea, by Endoios, and two carved supports from the tent of Alexander the Great.¹⁴⁰ There were also, Pliny tells us, two paintings by Apelles in a highly frequented area of the Forum.¹⁴¹ One of these depicted Alexander the Great with the Dioscurides and a figure of Nike; the other showed

¹³⁷ Bergmann 1995: 106.

¹³⁸ See e.g. Zanker 1968; 1988: 167–239; Spannagel 1999; Geiger 2008; Shaya 2013. Cf. especially Valentin Kockel in *LTUR* II, 289–295, s.v. *Forum Augustum*, with bibliography. Important ancient sources include: Aug. *RG* 21; Suet. *Aug.* 29.1–2; *Cal.* 44.2; Ovid *Fast.* 5.563–578; Cass. Dio. 55.10.2–5; Gell. *NA* 9.11.10; Tact. *Ann.* 4.5, 13.8.

¹³⁹ For which see La Rocca 2001: 184–195; Rizzo 2001: 230–234; Meneghini and Santangeli Valenziani 2007: 44–46, 57–58.

¹⁴⁰ For the statue see Paus. 8.46.1; *DNO* no. 365; for the tent supports Plin. *HN* 34.48.

¹⁴¹ Plin *HN* 35.27; cf. 35.93; *DNO* nos. 2916–2918.



Figure 5.18 Hall of the Colossus, Forum of Augustus, Rome, late first century BCE.

Alexander, in a triumphal chariot and an allegory of war with her hands bound. The political message of these paintings is clear; the analogy between the two figures was so obvious that Claudius, long after Augustus' death, had the face of Alexander in these paintings removed, and replaced with portraits of Augustus. These paintings may have been housed, moreover, in the so-called Hall of the Colossus, an area of the Forum which once held a colossal statue – probably the Colossus of Augustus mentioned by Martial (8.44.7). On the flanking wall, we can observe cutouts in the wall, over a high dado, separated by pilasters with Corinthian capitals, and under a projecting cornice (Figure 5.18). Although these architectural elements do not exactly mimic the stage-fronts and *aediculae* we witness in the paintings of fictive *pinacothecae*, they are nevertheless remarkably similar modes of display. There are six cutouts in all in the Hall of the Colossus, four relatively narrow rectangles

and two squares: we cannot prove but might suggest that they once held large-scale panel paintings.¹⁴²

The collection of the Forum of Augustus bears little resemblance to that of the Farnesina in its individual components or constitutive parts. Yet under a political reading their functions may be analogous. In this view, in both public and private contexts, images re-stage history primarily to produce a naturalized view of the present. Time leads in one direction, and the age that produced the murals both stands at its end and represents its logical conclusion. One effect of the *summi viri* arrayed in the forum would have been to turn that space, ostensibly belonging to the state as a whole, into a stage for the display of portraits of the family of Augustus, a practice typical of aristocratic domestic houses, encouraging the conflation between private and public monument.¹⁴³ A parallel but reversed logic would seem to be at play at the Farnesina, where the appearance of a seemingly encyclopedic *pinacotheca*, a collection of pictures attesting both to the development of painting in the Greek world and to the Roman conquest of that world, would have been analogous the military triumphs and political hegemony of the Roman state.

Aesthetics and Anachronism

But once again it is difficult to resolve the inherent polysemy of Roman mural production into a single, purely political, meaning, and there may still be more at play. The relation of artistic style to time could be vexed in Rome. Tonio Hölscher, for example, has proposed a semantic model of stylistic retrospection in Roman art, in which the act of retrospection need not have a temporal component.¹⁴⁴ Rather than referring to specific artists or even to general historical periods, Hölscher proposes that classicizing traits associated with artists such as Phidias and Polykleitos instead invoked specifically Roman virtues.¹⁴⁵ The primary references of such

¹⁴² The proposal is not certain; Pliny only discusses two paintings, while the hall has six insets, and he notes that they were in a “highly frequented” part of the forum. But Zanker points out that, if the paintings by Apelles were hung here, then their renovation under Claudius could have directly coincided with the erection by Claudius of the Colossus of Augustus. See Giovenale 1929; Zanker 1968: 23–24; Daut 1984; Scheibler 1994: 28–29; Coarelli 2007: 111; Bragantini 2014: 321–322. It should be noted that the back wall of the hall, moreover, appears to have featured marble revetment which itself was painted. See Ungaro 2004.

¹⁴³ E.g. Rowell 1940; Severy 2004: 167–171; Suet. *Aug.* 31.

¹⁴⁴ E.g. Hölscher 2004; 2006; cf. Childs 2005.

¹⁴⁵ For Phidias see *DNO* nos. 841–1075; for Polykleitos *DNO* nos. 1205–1294.

works would be to contemporary values that had already been encoded in the styles they deployed. Accordingly, a Roman viewer seeing a statue worked in the style of Phidias would not think of fifth-century Greece, or even necessarily of the past, but rather of an abstract value like *maiestas*, grandeur, or *pondus*, solemn dignity.¹⁴⁶

Hölscher's thesis has important implications for the study of Roman art. It alleviates the burden of connoisseurship from the average Roman viewer, emphasizes the Roman aspect of apparently Greek elements in Roman art, and brilliantly instrumentalizes the often-intractable idea of style. Should we, accordingly, understand the act of stylistic retrospection at the Farnesina semantically, without reference to time? Perhaps in some senses we should; the fifth-century styles of the white-ground paintings may have been judged more appropriate to those paintings' subject matter, and so too the Hellenistic style of the Dionysus panel.¹⁴⁷ Yet we may not be able to discard the element of time altogether. The deliberate juxtaposition of such varied and precise retrospections, especially within the context of a collection of pictures, would seem to indicate that these specific temporal styles played an important role in the overall conception of the Farnesina murals.

Returning to the concept of the paradigm may help unravel this knot. Unlike the teleological model, the paradigmatic interpretation of the Farnesina collection would not cast the Roman present as the inevitable culmination of the Greek past, and unlike Hölscher's semantic model it does not discard the element of time entirely. It would see the Farnesina's collection of pictures not as an attempt to own history but as a desire to participate in it anachronically, a contribution to, rather than a mere imitation of, the history of panel painting. This paradigmatic interpretation is suggested by a number of factors. One is embodied by the murals' complex acts of remediation, achieved through the simultaneous superimposition of levels of fiction and planes of representation. Such remediations lend a unique cast to the formation of the Farnesina collection, which is of course not composed of physical objects but instead of the idea of Greek panel painting.¹⁴⁸ In order to represent that idea the murals must make it manifest; they must effect a substitution. This substitution is never

¹⁴⁶ Hölscher 2004: 52, 92–93.

¹⁴⁷ The mutual appropriateness of form, content, and setting lay at the heart of one of the most significant Roman aesthetic concepts, that of *decor* or *decorum*. Vit. *De arch.* 1.2.5–7; 6.5.1–3; 7.5.1–4; Varr. *Rust.* 2.praef. See for discussion e.g. Pollitt 1974: 68–70, 341–347; Perry 2005: 28–49; cf. Neudecker 1988; Clarke 1991: 49–54, 369–371; Barbanera 2011: 77; Bravi 2012; Nichols 2017: 155–158.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. e.g. Hallett 2005: 434.

physical; the mural panel remains materially continuous with the rest of the fresco. The Greek panel is the subject of the Farnesina collection, but in the place of its actual presence the viewer must make do with its representation.

On the one hand this is a potentially ironizing comment on the poverty of representation, but on the other it represents the serious possibility that the idea of panel painting may be divorced from the actual matter of painting. The Farnesina frescoes stage the materiality of the painted panel – through the tricks of spatial recession, through the intimation of physical matter like ivory or marble, and through the clear dissociation of planes of representation. But this second-order materiality is without matter. As an object of collection, the value of the panel is clearly visual, but this visual value is also disconnected in significant ways (though not in every sense) from its material substrate. It is aesthetic, in other words.

It remains a matter of debate whether or not antiquity possessed a special category of aesthetics, or indeed of art in anything like the modern sense; a formal definition of such a category does not appear in the surviving literature.¹⁴⁹ But where the teleological interpretation of the Farnesina frescoes would treat the phenomenon of panel painting, whether fictive or real, primarily as testaments to political reality, the paradigmatic model would both liberate the paintings from instrumental purposes and preserve their aesthetic force. That none of the fictive panels of the Farnesina appear to be copies of known Greek masterworks may, perhaps ironically, speak in favor of this model. If the idea of Greek panel painting collected at the Farnesina were coterminous with any specific panel paintings, the collection may have been too easily revealed as a mere imitation, a pale shadow of the glories of the past. Temporally precise but authorially vague mural panels, however, occupy a space in between. The medial games of the Farnesina stage the Greek panel as both an object of imitation and an object of collection, and in so doing help frame the temporal and historical issues at stake.

The history of Greek painting, stretching from fifth-century linearity to third-century colorism and beyond, is encapsulated in the fictive panels of the Farnesina, but at the time of their execution the murals themselves were contemporary products. The fresco technique, of all modes of painting, demands temporal unity and cohesion of working method. More forthrightly than any other extant example, the Farnesina paintings stage their

¹⁴⁹ For this debate, see e.g. Alsop 1982; Kristeller 1990; Shiner 2001: 19–27; Platt and Squire 2010; Porter 2010b; Jones 2016: 1–23.

own anachronism. They juxtapose the development of Greek painting over time with the obvious fact of their contemporary execution. The assemblage of styles in the collection is a statement of virtuosity, if not on the part of a single artist, such as the Seleukos whose signature and claim of authorship was scratched onto a painted column in *cubiculum* D, then certainly on the part of the larger workshop responsible for the villa's painted decoration.¹⁵⁰ Yet it is also a way of removing the painting styles of the past from the realm of history and of bringing them into dialogue with those of the present. In the fictive collection of the Farnesina, the passage of time, marked by changes in style, is highlighted so that it may be effaced.

The inclusive logic of the paradigm frames such acts of anachronism. If the mural panels of the Farnesina and other Roman walls are included in the paradigm of panel painting, then the tradition of Roman painting is not just brought into contact with that of Greek painting, it becomes an extension of it, and vice versa. Pliny contrasts Roman with Greek painting in part through differences of medium and format; the Roman mural panel proclaims that they belong to a single paradigm. The substitution effected by the fictive, mural panel, accordingly, may have worked in both directions: both the history of panel painting and the contemporary mastery of that history could be objects of collection.

In the multiple temporalities of the Farnesina murals we are granted a unique insight into the Roman conception of art, and of Rome's place in art's history. Above all, we are struck by a kind of double ontology, a quality of both-and. At the Farnesina the work of art, at least as symbolized by the painted panel, is an object of both imitation and collection. It is both a political entity and a source of aesthetic delight. The murals themselves both stand outside the history of Greek painting and participate in it. These are only a few of the dichotomies deliberately staged against each other: materiality and immateriality, authorship and anonymity, public and private, immersion and isolation, wall and panel all circulate in apparent equilibrium. In recognizing that these apparent paradoxes did not stymie, but rather spurred artistic creation, we may begin to see the outlines of the ancient Roman art world.

¹⁵⁰ Bragantini and De Vos 1982: 22–23, fig. 1; Wylar 2006: 217, who suggests that the workshop responsible for the Farnesina decorations may have come to Italy from the eastern region of the Greek-speaking world.

In the essay “Modernist Painting,” first published in 1965, Clement Greenberg posited that the defining feature of modernism, in every facet of cultural production, lay “in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself – not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.”¹ In the visual arts, Greenberg asserts, this primarily takes the form of a kind of self-reflexivity organized around medium and, in painting, epitomized by abstraction. The teleology of self-reflexively abstract painting, for Greenberg, was to eliminate every element not particular to the medium of painting itself. Traditional European painting had used “art to conceal art;” it had, at great effort, deployed a host of techniques of pictorial illusion in the representation of religious, mythic, and historical content.² In modernist painting, by contrast, illusory depth would yield to two-dimensionality, and the matter of painting itself, rather than any external referent, would become the explicit subject matter of the artwork. A modernist painting is a picture, first and foremost, and only ever incidentally a picture *of* anything. The thick black lines, stark right angles, and brightly colored rectangles of a painting like Piet Mondrian’s *Trafalgar Square* (1939–1943) not only explore the flatness of the picture plane and the disembodied opticality of non-referential pigment, they replicate the initial conditions, the very material possibilities, of the modern easel painting (Figure E.1). Painting itself can be the only possible subject of such a composition.

The similarities between Greenberg’s account of modernist painting and the ancient murals discussed in this book are striking. These Roman meta-pictures are not only paintings *of* paintings, but paintings *about* painting, whose primary subject matter was the production and consumption of painting itself, with all the ethical and aesthetic entanglements that entailed. The overlap, of course, is far from complete. For Greenberg, modernist painting’s self-reflexivity was above all else a matter of aesthetic autonomy, a way for the visual arts to justify their existence on their own terms and independently of any other discourse.³ This book has suggested that, unlike

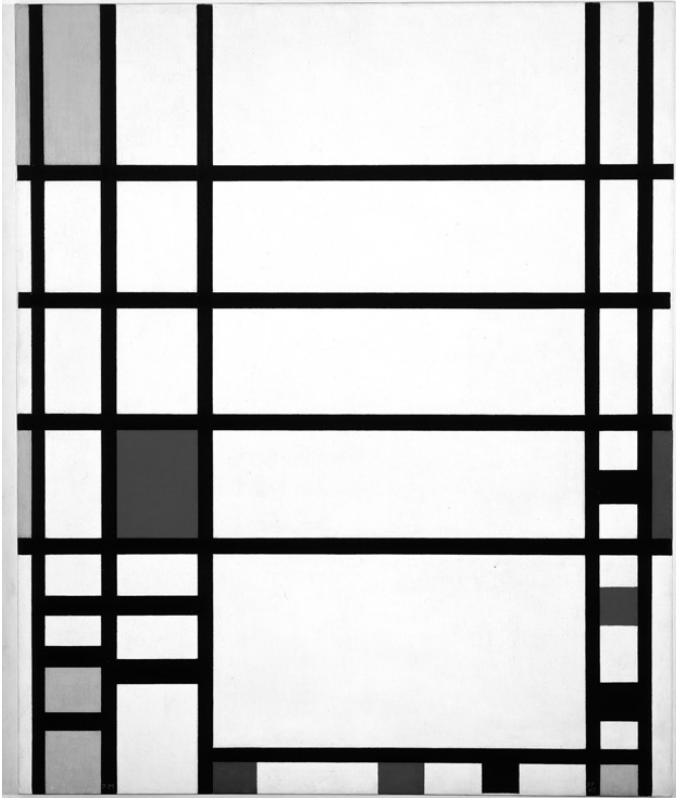


Figure E.1 *Trafalgar Square*. Piet Mondrian, 1939–1943.

the self-reflexive modernist canvas, the Roman fictive panel does not simply proclaim its autonomy; its existence depends upon being embedded both within a mural framework and the larger social forces within which the mural and the house itself are constructed. And unlike the self-reflexive modernist canvas, Roman meta-painting does not suggest the supremacy of the purely aesthetic, demonstrating instead the impossibility of extricating the aesthetic from the ethical.

Yet much like modernist painting, the Roman mural panel hypostatizes its own fiction; it is not only aware of its conditions of production and consumption but also reifies them for the purpose of critique. And in so doing, this book has suggested, the murals discussed here figure the possibilities and limitations of painting in the Roman world. The differences between the two epochs are as significant as the similarities, for the Roman examples may not just anticipate the concerns of modernism, they may even open up new avenues to interpret modernist



Figure E.2 Drawing on celluloid of Aphrodite, Eros, and attendant from *Cubiculum B*, Villa della Farnesina. Gregorio Mariani, late nineteenth century.

thinking.⁴ Acknowledging the daring inherent to the Roman painting of painting, ultimately, contributes to our understanding not only of Rome but also of the broader span of art history.

As a last gesture toward both the proximity and the distance between the ancient and modern worlds, I close the book, finally, as it opened, with a modern representation of an ancient representation (Figure E.2). Here, however, we are dealing with the depiction not of a lost painting, but of one

⁴ Greenberg's position, of course, is not the only perspective on the modernist project. It has been vigorously challenged from a wide variety of angles. But it remains among the most influential approaches. See e.g. Clark 1982; de Duve 1996; Foster *et al.* 2011: esp. 351–356, 477–482, 718–720.

that survives in comparatively good condition. In the archives of the German Archaeological Institute in Rome there is a late nineteenth-century line drawing of the central panel of the left wall of *cubiculum* B of the Villa della Farnesina, showing the seated figure of Aphrodite and attendants.⁵ Produced at a time when photography had entered the toolbox of the archaeologist but had not yet fully supplanted graphic representation as a means of communicating visual information, the drawing's accuracy is remarkable. Its artist, Gregorio Mariani, succeeded in capturing the grace and precision of line of the original, even while sacrificing the subtle polychromy that makes the importance of that line so clear.⁶ The drawing recapitulates the white background of the original and even approximates its arcuated frame.

Yet more than just transmitting information about the Farnesina painting, the drawing also encodes an important act of remediation, executed as it was not on paper but on a sheet of celluloid, an early thermoplastic compound that had been invented only a few decades prior. The drawing, a preparatory work for a lithograph that appeared in volume 12 of the *Monumenti inediti* published by the Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica, the forerunner to the German Archaeological Institute, has in fact been impressed into the surface of the celluloid sheet.⁷ Was this done, perhaps, so that the design on the celluloid could be more easily transferred to the lithograph stone? A comparison of the etched celluloid and the printed lithograph reveals that the transfer between media was likely not mechanical, and that, even if this were the case, further refinements must have been made directly on the stone. The final product is given depth and texture by cross-hatching that is absent from the initial drawing, and it also features the edges of the scene's architectural frame. Nevertheless, in contour and composition, the two works match closely; the mechanical reproduction of the printing process has largely served to disseminate the subtleties of Mariani's hand.⁸

⁵ DAIR A-VII-69-028, housed in the Engraving, Drawings, Paintings, and Plans section of the Historical Archive of the Rome department of the German Archaeological Institute. Cf. Unger and Garello 2014.

⁶ For the artist, see e.g. Blanck and Weber-Lehmann 1987: 55-57; cf. Conticello 1989: 95-110. My thanks to Valeria Capobianco of the German Archaeological Institute in Rome for directing me to these references.

⁷ *Monumenti inediti* 1885: 58, pl. 21.

⁸ For a companion piece depicting the painting of the infant Dionysus with the nymphs from the back wall of *cubiculum* B, see DAIR A-VII-69-029, and for the published version see *Monumenti inediti* 1885: 56, pl. 20.

But the shifts from painting to etched celluloid, to lithograph stone, to printed and bound book are not the only games of mediation at play here. One of the most common early uses of celluloid was as a kind of faux ivory, a notional substitution of medium based on select aesthetic properties – especially visual ones – which echoes the fact that the white backgrounds of fictive paintings, like the example from the Farnesina, themselves refer to and even act as substitutes for precious materials such as marble and ivory. And a still more suggestive act of mediation lies in the future of celluloid itself, which would ultimately come to be used as the film in cinema reels. The background of the drawing, although white in the reproduction given here, is potentially translucent, receptive to having light projected through it. We cannot imagine that Mariani conceived of the drawing in this way, and we have no evidence that it was ever used as a medium of projection.⁹ Nevertheless, the correspondence is striking, and we also cannot entirely discount the possibility that light may have been projected through the image, even if only incidentally, as it was held up to the sun or a lamp. And if, for the sake of argument, the drawing had in fact been projected against a surface, it would have achieved an entirely new form, as a kind of virtual image. An entity of apparently pure light, this projection would have dramatically remediated the initial Roman meta-image, taking its evocation of materiality without matter, and of the Farnesina's broader conceit of a collection without objects, to the extreme of an image without a body.

Whether, speculatively, a medium of projection or, more securely, a step in the chain of the transmission of visual information permitted by the printing press, the celluloid drawing touches on precisely the questions this book has sought to explore – of surface and depth, frame and framed, medium and material, past and present, and even of representation and reality. Not a work of art in anything like Greenberg's sense, it nevertheless actively reflects on the matter and processes of art making. It follows the same thread that links Mondrian, Velázquez, the painters of the Farnesina, and, ultimately, the Greek masters who have been lost to history in all but name. In each case, the act of visual self-reflexivity creates not a feedback loop but its inverse: the possibility for new expression.

⁹ On early experiments with projected images in late nineteenth-century art-historical instruction, see Reichle 2002.

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Index

- Achilles, 12, 57, 60, 81, 83, 103, 173, 174, 175, 190
 - shield of, 173–175
- Achilles Painter, 211, 212, 213
- Actaeon, 177, 178
- Actium, Battle of, 110, 117
- Aeneas, 101, 102, 103, 104, 190, 224
- Aeneid* (Vergil), 29
- aesthetic(s)
 - autonomy of, 48
 - dual deployment of, 48, 49–50
 - judgment, works of art, 47
 - of art consumption, 135–136
 - text, 49
 - value of art, 113
- Agamben, Giorgio, 196
- Agatharchus of Samos, 159, 160
- Agrippa, Marcus Vipsanius, 118, 149, 191, 195
- Ajax, 57, 118, 119
- Alexander the Great, 119, 224
- Alexandria
 - lighthouse of, 110
 - painters' workshop from, 109
- Alexandrian
 - architecture and paintings, influence on
 - Roman paintings, 111
 - painters, 110, 129
 - tombs, 169
- Alexandros the Athenian (*Knucklebones Players*), 22, 23, 72, 85
- Alma Tadema, Lawrence, 39
- anachronism, 195, 196, 197, 204, 229
- Andromeda, 185, 186, 188, 189
- aniconic markers, 106, 108, 109
- aniconism, 108, 109
- Anthony, 101, 117
- Antichità di Ercolano esposte*, 16, 17
 - publication of Herculaneum paintings, 16
- Antikythera, 218
 - Mechanism, 219
- Antiochus Galbinus, 21
- Antiphrilos of Alexandria, 120
- Antony, Mark, 117, 118
- Apelles, 20, 21, 120, 125, 157, 193, 195, 216, 224, 226
- Aphrodite, 109, 207, 213, 232, 233
- Aphrodite Anadyomene*, 113, 119, 129, 130, 157, 193
- Apollodoros of Athens, 18
- Apulian red-figure painting, 60–62, 171
- Arcesilaus, 126
- Archaic Style, 57
- Archdukes Albert and Isabella in a Cabinet of Curiosities, The*, 57
- archives, written vs. material, 25
- Ardea, 18, 19, 20
- Arellius, 20
- Argus, 139, 142, 182, 183, 185, 188
- Ariadne, 199, 214
- Aristotle
 - dual nature of pictures, 154
 - logic, paradigmatic, 196
 - painted panels and memories, comparison, 152–153
 - to metaxu in De Anima*, 145–146
- art
 - history of, 22–26
 - progression of styles, 222
 - Roman conception of, 229
- Artemis. *See* Diana
- artistic
 - culture, ancient, 195
 - fiction, 47, 63
 - media, 144, 157
 - medium of painting, 145
 - motifs, 111
 - production, 9, 24, 48, 59, 197, 204
 - representation, 140, 173
 - style, periods, 222 *See also* style, artistic
- artistic value, paintings of paintings, 4
- artwork, conception of
 - art history, 7
 - central figurative scenes, 88
 - Farnesina murals, 227
 - modern, 56
 - of paintings (*tableau*), 55
 - paintings, 5

- Asclepius, 216
 Athena, 118, 224
 Athenaeus, 126, 217
 Athens
 ornaments of, 114
 Stoa Poikile, 112
 atmosphere
 immaterial, 140
 in central landscapes, 148
 physical presence of, 147
 surrounding figures, 143
 atomism, Democritean, 146
 atomist theory of vision, 146, 147
 atomistic philosophy, 32
atomos, concept of, 32

 Baia, 192
 Baumgarten, Alexander, 48
 Bergmann, Bettina, 224
 Berlin Foundry Cup, 57–60
 black-figure technique, 57
 Bolter, Jay, 138
 Boscoreale, Villa of P. Fannius Synistor, 41, 54, 77, 128, 141, 158
 Boscotrecase, Augustan Villa, 42, 43, 148, 149, 190, 191

 Caere, 18, 19
 Caesar, Julius
 cult status of, 65
 death of, 101
 Forum of, 126, 129, 224
 painted panels, public influence to, 118
 Caligula, 18, 19, 110, 193
 Callexenus of Rhodes, 217
 Cameo, 65, 66
 canon, literary and artistic, 26, 27, 30, 165
 Carettoni, Gianfilippo, 98
 Cassius Dio. *See* Dio Cassius
 Cato the Elder (the Censor), 114, 115, 116, 124, 135
 Catullus, 31
 Catulus, Quintus Lutatius, 95
 celluloid, 233
 drawing of Aphrodite and Eros on, 232, 234
 Cestius, Gaius, 130, 131, 150
 Choephoroi Painter, 187
 Christian view of art, 194
 Cicero, Marcus Tullius
 on his art collections, 125, 129
 on artworks in Rome through conquest, 223
 on Lucullus, 126
 on immediacy of vision, 145

 Classical Greek vases, 62–64
 classical style, early, 192
 Claudius, 195, 225, 226
 Cleopatra and Caesar, 111
 collections
 of art, 216, 217
 at the Farnesina, 227
 at Forum of Augustus, 226
 of poetry, 217
 structure of, 217
 of styles, assemblage, 229
 temporal manipulations, 221–222
 coloristic technique, Hellenistic period, 208, 222
 color, uses of
 and light, 213
 as medium, 145
 as picture frames, 34
 black (Black Room), 148–149
 white, 140–143, 148, 169
 conceit
 architectural, 112, 148
 at Farnesina murals, 215, 234
 in Herodium paintings, 134
 light-source as, 152
 of plane of representation, 52
 pictorial, 91
 representation of representation, 1
 Second Style, 81, 141, 222
 conquest, Greek art in Rome, 29
 convergences, perspectival, 158, 159, 162
 copy
 criticism (recovery of lost), 108
 discourse of, 182
 of Greek paintings, 7, 179
 investigation of Roman, 180
 works of art, reproduction of, 180 *See also* House of Livia; original
 Corinth, 114, 119, 122, 222
 Cretan Cycle, 198, 199, 203
 Cupid. *See* Eros
 Cybele, cult of, 108

 Daedalus, 43, 84, 198, 200
 Damophilos, 21
decor, 32, 227
 Delos, 73, 111, 218
 Delphi, 15
 Demetrios (painter), 21, 110
 Democritus, 146, 159, 160
 Derrida, Jacques, 47
 paradox of the frame, 48, 50
 Diana, 107, 108, 177, 178, 182

- Digest* of Justinian, 87
 Dio Cassius, 121, 124
 Dionysios (painter), 21
 Dionysus and satyr, painting of, 52–54
 disruption, of fiction and painting, 5, 55, 207
 See also doubling and disruption
 Dorotheus, 193, 195
 doubling, 36, 55, 92 *See also* disruption;
 doubling and disruption
 doubling and disruption, 35, 37, 132, 164
 See also disruption; doubling
 drama, Roman, 165
 dramatic masks, 12, 63, 81, 99, 206, 214
 Drerup, Heinrich, 158, 159

 Edict of Diocletian on Maximum Prices, 87, 129
 Edwards, Catherine, 96, 165
 Egypt and Rome, cultural ties. *See* Rome and
 Egypt, cultural ties
 Egyptiana, 109–110
 Elsner, Jaś, 44, 110, 155, 195, 214
 embedding, 4, 47, 62, 86–87, 173
 encaustic, 21, 60
 Encolpius, 216
 encyclopedism, 223
 Endoios, 224
 Engemann, Josef, 161
 Ennius, 30, 165
 ensembles
 architectural, 88, 158
 decorative, 40
 of fictive paintings, 7, 179, 197, 200, 204
 fresco, 16
 at the House of Pompeii, 200–202
 mural, 4, 10
 Epicurean philosophy, 32
 Eros, 3, 182, 189, 190, 193, 201, 232
 ethics, of art, 94
 value of, 113
 Etruscan, 21
 Exekias, 57, 58
 exemplarity, 179, 196, 222

 Fabius Pictor, 20
 Famulus, 20, 25
 Farnesina. *See* Villa of Farnesina
 Feeney, Dennis, 30–31, 221
fictio, 34–35
 fiction, dual valences of, 35–38
 fictive, definition, 35
 fictive paintings, 54
 fictive panels
 aspects, manipulation of, 179
 content and format of, 132
 as an exemplary paradigm, 197
 logic of super-genre, 133
 objects of art history, 179
 political aspect, 135
 super-genre, 132–134
 and wall paintings, 67, 88
 figural paintings, 67
 First Style, 41, 42, 152
 Forum of Augustus, 224–226
 Hall of the Colossus, 225
 paintings, political message of, 225
 Fourth Style
 in Campania, 42
 materiality, inconsistency with, 77
 mythological paintings, 201
 wall paintings, 43, 87, 173, 198
 frame, enclosed in (*peplaisiōmenos*), 80
 frames and framing
 concept of, 17–18
 Derrida, Jacques on, 47–48
 Harries, Karsten on, 47
 importance of, 6, 16
 paradox of the frame, 91–92
 frameworks, spatial depth, 52
 frescoes. *See* murals
 fresco techniques, 87, 228
 Fruit Gallery. *See* *oporothea*
 Furtwängler, Adolf, 180

 Gaifman, Milette, 108
 Galatea, 182, 184, 189, 190, 191
 gaze, 163, 173, 201
 Gee, Regina, 44
 genre. *See* fictive panels
 German Archaeological Institute, line drawing
 of Farnesina, 233
 Gnosis, 213
 Gombrich, Ernst, 153 *See also* seeing-as;
 seeing-in
 Gordon, Richard, 26
 Gorgasos, 21
 Grau, Oliver, 155
 Greco-Roman art, history of ancient,
 9–10
 Greek art
 classical, 24
 desirable and censurable, 125
 Roman reception of, 29
 transformation in Rome of, 33
 Greek panel paintings. *See* Italic (Roman) wall
 paintings
 Greenberg, Clement, 230

- Gruen, Erich, 27, 114
 Grusin, Richard, remediation, 138
 gymnasium, 15, 220
- Hadrian, 169, 195
 Hallett, Christopher, 27
 Harries, Karsten, 47
 Hecate, 107
 Helen, 18, 110, 112, 201, 203
 Hellenistic Mediterranean, circulation of
 painting within, 89
 Hellenization, 27
 of Roman elite, 31
 Hephaistos, 60, 173, 175
 Hera, 142, 182, 187
 Herakles, 60, 61, 62, 118, 126
 Herculaneum
 discovery and excavation of, 11, 38
 paintings from *palestra* of, 5, 12, 13, 14, 22, 24, 37–38
 Winckelmann's approach to, 11–14, 33–34, 39–40
 Samnite House, 40, 41
 Villa of the Papyri, 50–52, 75
 Hercules. *See* Herakles
 Hermes, 139, 142, 182, 185, 221
 Herod, 134
 Herodas, fourth *mimiamb*, 216
 Herodium, 133, 134, 135
 Herodotus, 108
 Heslin, Peter, 103
 Hippolytus, 201
History of the Art of Antiquity (Winckelmann),
 5–6, 11, 16, 24, 34, 39
 in comparison to *Description of Greece*
 (Pausanias), 14–15
 Holliday, Peter, 102, 222
 Hölscher, Tonio, 226
 Homer, 12, 31, 174
 Horace, 29
 House of Augustus, 96–101, 166
 Lower *Cubiculum*, 167
 Room of the Masks, 98, 104, 106, 141
 House of Livia
 mythological paintings, copy discourse,
 182–185, 189
 reality and illusion, tension between, 140
 tablinum, 139, 141, 145, 154, 166
 House of Octavius Quartio, 175–178
 houses
 of Marcus Aemilius Scaurus, description
 (Pliny), 95–96
 paintings of paintings in, 113
 as private space, 96
 social significance of, 94–97
 Hutchinson, Gregory, 25, 132
 hypermediacy, 138, 143
- Iaia of Cyzicus, 21, 25
 Icarus, 198, 199, 200
ichnographia, 159
 iconography, 15, 74, 109, 113, 194
 Egyptian, 109
 Ideal Sculpture. *See* mythological sculpture
 Iliad, 60
 Iliupersis Painter, 169, 171
 Illusion and immersion, techniques of, 7, 137
 images of images, on coins, 64
 imitation
 of Classical Greece, 180
 paradigm, model for, 195
 immateriality, white color, 140
 immediacy
 enargeia, 145
 of exemplarity, 196
 and hypermediacy, dual logic of, 138, 143
 limits of, 178
 and remediation, 155
 of visual representation, 175
 immersion
 asymmetrical perspective, 161
 illusion of, 155–157
 and isolation, 229
 murals, potential for, 138
 Roman mural painters, technology of
 illusion, 155
 Second Style perspective, 207
 impact of Greece on Rome, 28
 information, visual presentation of, 145
 intertextuality, 31, 65–66
 inventories, Delian, 75, 81, 88, 112, 142, 143,
 145, 208, 218 *See also* panel paintings,
 formats of in the Delian inventories
- Io
 and Argus, 139, 186, 187
 arrival in Egypt, 188
 and Polyphemus paintings, 190, 194
 Iser, Wolfgang, on the fictive, 35
 Isis, 72, 109, 185, 188, 206, 207
 cult of, 111
 Italic, 21, 27, 30
 Italic (Roman) wall paintings
 Pliny on, 18–19
 Pliny on panel painting, 19–20
 in comparison to Greek panel paintings,
 6, 18

- Josephus, Flavius, 72
 Judea, 133, 134, 135
 Juno. *See* [Hera](#)
 Jupiter. *See* [Zeus](#)
- Kant, Immanuel, 47, 48
 Kazanlak, Thracian tomb paintings at, 213
 Keeline, Tom, 31
 Kerch Sarcophagus, 89–90
 Kittler, Friedrich, 146
- Labyrinth, 84, 85, 198, 199
 landscapes, 130, 132, 133
 Lanuvium, 19, 20, 184
 Latin vocabulary
 of architecture, 32
 Greek vs., 32–33
 Leach, Eleanor Winsor, 69, 133
 Leocares, Apollo Belvedere, 192
Letter on the Herculaneum Discoveries
 (Winckelmann), 11, 22
 Lippold, Georg, 180
 lithograph, 105, 139, 233, 234
 Livius Andronicus, 31, 165
 Livy, 28, 114, 115
 Lucian, 12, 26, 193
 Lucilius, 32, 36, 37, 171
 Lucretius, 32, 146, 147, 159
 Lucullus, Lucius Licinius, 126, 129, 135
ludi scaenici, 163, 165
 luxury
 expression of, 115
 material, 41
 as moral decline, 115
 pleasures without, 6
 in private life, 96, 116, 125
 self-indulgence, 93
 Lykaon Painter, 209
- McKenzie, Judith, 111
 McLuhan, Marshall, 138
 Magna Graecia, 12, 28
 Magna Mater. *See* [Cybele](#), cult of
 Maiuri, Amedeo, 87–88
 marble, view of, 144
 Marcellus, 28, 113, 116, 122
 Marconi, Clemente, 61, 62
 Mariani, Gregorio, 139, 233, 234
 Marin, Louis, 143
 rupture and interruption, 55
 Mars Ultor, 101, 102, 121, 157, 224
 Marx, Frederick, 37
 masterwork, 193, 194
 materiality, 228, 229
 Mau, August, 40, 45, 46, 69, 70 *See also*
 [Pompeian Styles](#), Four
 Medea, 118, 201
 mediation, 113, 138, 173, 234
 Mediterranean art, development of ancient, 24
 medium, 137, 167, 173, 179, 188, 229, 230, 234
 concept of, 144
 duplicity of, 147, 149
 and materiality, 137, 139
 Medusa, 177
 megalographies, at Villa of the Mysteries,
 67–70
 Meleager, Garlands of, 217
 Mercury. *See* [Hermes](#)
 meta-art, 156
 meta-literary devices, 65
 meta-painting, 4, 55–56, 138, 155, 231
 Roman, 173
 meta-pictoriality, 64, 65
 Metellus Macedonicus, Quintus Caecilius, 119
 Miles, Margaret, 116
 mimesis, techniques of, 47, 58, 175
 Minos, 198, 199, 204
 Minotaur, 84, 198, 199, 200
 mirrors and mirroring, 173, 175
 Mitchell, W.J.T., meta-pictures, 4
 modernist canvas, and Roman fictive panel,
 231–232
Modernist Painting (essay, Greenberg), 230
 modernist paintings, 230, 231
 Mondrian, Piet (*Trafalgar Square*), 230,
 231, 234
 monochrome, 151, 152, 156
 mosaic, *emblemata*, 83–85
 Mummius Achaicus, Lucius, 116, 119, 122, 222
 mummy, portraits, 71
 murals, 2, 3, 90, 140
 as cost-effective substitute, 129–131
 mythological paintings, 182, 198
 mythological sculpture, 180
- Naevius, 31, 165
 Nagel, Alexander, 194
naiskos, 168, 169, 172
 Naples
 archeological museum, 75
 excavations at, 11, 201
 Narcissus, 77, 176, 177
Natural History (Pliny), 7, 19, 20
 Naxos, 199
 Neer, Richard, 59
 Nero, 193

- Nike, 61, 224
 Nikias, 185
 as model for House of Livia painting, 186–188
 Nile River, 109, 110
 Niobe, 22
 Niobids, playing knucklebones, 22, 72
 Nodelman, Sheldon, 54–55
 Numa Pompilius, 36, 108
 Nyssa, nymphs of, 208
- Octavian. *See* Augustus
 Odysseus, 15
 Odyssey landscapes, 67, 68, 79, 198
 opacity. *See* transparency and opacity
 Oplontis, Villa A, 44, 162, 163, 168
oporothea, 126, 127
 original
 and copy, unidirectional model, 179
 context, 33, 38
 relationship to copy, 185, 197
 environments, 46 *See also* copy
orthographia, 159
 Ovid, 65, 72
- Pacuvius, 20
 paintings of painting, 1
 ambiguity of, 137
 appearance in political and social Roman world, 93
 embedded fictions, 37
 key to, 34
 pinacothecae, 46
 remediation, 194
 Palace of Domitian, 1–4
palestra. *See* Herculaneum
 Palestrina Nile Mosaic, 110, 111
 panel and mural painters, division of, 21–22
 panel paintings, 9
 fictive, mural, 88
 material supports for, other, 72
 physicality of, 70
 Roman-Egypt, examples from, 71–72
 transferability, 137–138
 panel paintings, formats of in the Delian inventories, 73
 ceiling coffers (*orophikoi*), 81, 208
 embedded (*emblētos*), 83, 85, 86, 88, 152, 207
 in friezes (*makroi diazomatikoi*), 80
 hanging, (*ērtēmenoi*), 81
 pierced (*tetrupēmenos*), 81
 on top of bases (*epi baseōs*), 82
 with shutters (*tethurōmenoi*), 76, 77, 88
 without shutters (*athurōtoi*), 76, 78, 207
 panels and murals
 contrasting approaches, 45
 tension between, 46
 Panofsky, Erwin (“The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline”), 48–49, 160
 paradigm, Platonic, 195
 paradigm (*paradeigma*)
 concept of, 195–196, 197, 229
 formation, dynamic model of, 179
 as model for imitation, 195
parergon, 47
 Paris, 110, 112, 201, 203
 Parrhasius, 37, 74
 Parthenon frieze, 189
 Pasiphae, 43, 198
 Patroclus, 12
 patrons, 21, 88, 113, 145, 158, 195, 214
 Pausanias, 14–15
 Pella, 213
 Penthesilea Painter, 210, 213
 perception, 145–147
 Pergamene tapestries, 130, 150
 Pergamon, 116
pergula pictorum, 37
periaktos, 139, 141, 142, 143, 166
 peristyle, 62, 98, 99, 214
 Perry, Ellen, 192
 Perseus, 185, 189
 persona, public, 94, 96, 133
 perspective construction, 158–162
 perspective paintings. *See* scene paintings
 Petronius, 127, 216
 Phaedra, 201, 202
 Phiale Painter, 188
 Philostratus, 87, 190, 217
 pictorial illusion, 37
 Picture Gallery. *See* *pinacotheca*
pinacotheca, 85, 126, 128, 215, 216, 226
pinax. *See* panel painting
 Pinus, Cornelius, 20
 plaster, 19
 Plautus, 65, 86, 165
 Pliny the Elder, 18, 25, 127
 art-historical books, division into media, 144
 domestic decoration, complex interactions of, 95
 Plutarch, 115
 poems, garlands of Philip and Meleager, 217
 poetry, 30, 31, 35, 199, 201, 204
 Poikilia, 57
 political art
 domestic space, 101–102

- public space, 102
- Pollio, Asinius, 120
- Pollio, Vedius, 123
- Polybius, 28, 113
- polychrome, 133, 214
- Polygnotos, 15, 120, 222
- Polykleitos, 221, 226
- Polyphemus. *See* Galatea; Io
- Pompeian Styles, Four, 40–45 *See also* Mau, August; *and specific Styles*
- Pompeii
 - House of Jason (IX.5.18), 200, 202, 203
 - House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto (V.4.a, 11), 82
 - House of Meleager (VI.9.2), 185, 186
 - House of Obellius Firmus (IX.14.4), 80–81, 85–86
 - House of Octavius Quartio (II.2.2), 175, 176, 177
 - House of Sallust (VI.2.4), 87
 - House of Terentius Neo (VII.2.6), 75, 76
 - House of the Colored Capitals (VI.4.31.51), 190
 - House of the Cryptoporticus (I.6.2), 78–80, 141, 142, 198
 - House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.2, 13), 185
 - House of the Duke d'Aumale (VI.7.15), 188
 - House of the Epigrams (V.1.18), 69, 70, 85
 - House of the Golden Bracelet (VI.17.42), 91, 156, 157
 - House of the Great Altar (VI.16.15), 77–78
 - House of the Labyrinth (VI.11.10), 84, 151–152
 - House of the Marine Venus (II.3.3), 157
 - House of the Orchard (I.9.5), 214, 215
 - House of the Priest Amandus (I.7.7), 190
 - House of the Surgeon (VI.1.10), 90–91
 - House of the Vestals (VI.1.7), 81, 82
 - House of the Vettii (VI.15.1), 42–43, 44
 - House with a library (VI.17.41), 168, 172
 - Praedia of Julia Felix (II.4.3), 38, 149–151
 - Temple of Apollo (VI.7.32), 103, 104, 105
 - Temple of Isis (VIII.7.28), 185, 188
 - Villa Imperiale, 198, 199, 200
 - Villa of the Mysteries, 52–54, 55, 75, 77, 147, 155
- porta regia*, 166
- Portici, 38, 39, 152
- portico
 - Campanian Villa, 87
 - House of the Great Altar, 78
 - of Livia, 123
 - Temple of Apollo, Pompeii, 103
 - at Tusculum, 125
- portrait
 - Divus Iulius, 64
 - honorific, 219
 - Imperial, dissemination of, 192
 - panels, 74, 89
 - Septimius Severus, 41
- Posidippus, epigrams of, 144, 217
- Praxiteles, 120
- Prima Porta, Villa of Livia, 27, 155, 157
- primordia rerum*, 32
- Priscus, Attius, 20
- private display of art. *See* display, artistic
- Propylaia, paintings in, 127
- Protogenes, 20, 21, 125, 216
- Ptolemy II, 217
- Ptolemy VI, 110
- public and private arts, discourse of, 113
 - art works in public buildings, 120, 121–122
 - condemnation of private collections, 118
 - ethical view of, 115, 116–117, 123–124
 - Pompey the Great, theatrical complex, 120
 - public art display spaces, 119
 - Politics of, 134–135
 - religious significance of Greek art, 114
 - Temple of Concord, 123
- Pulcher, Appius Claudius, 164
- Pyramus, 175, 176
- Quintilian, 25, 193, 222
- Rawson, Elizabeth, 135
- relief
 - Ikarios, 63
 - painted, 214
 - plaque, 62, 219
 - sculpture, 1, 62, 67, 137, 152, 219, 220
- remediation
 - dual logic of, 149
 - of the painting of painting, 138, 155
- Renaissance, 11, 39, 158, 160, 194
- replica, 191, 194, 197
- representation
 - as figure, 153
 - as likeness, 153
- Rizzo, Giulio Emmanuele, 112
- Roman and Greek cultural identities, 26–28
- Roman art, concept of, 10–11, 24
- Roman fictive panels, 57, 91
- Roman painters discussed by Pliny, 20
- Rome
 - Ara Pacis Augustae, 222
 - Aula Isiaca, 109, 111

- Rome (cont.)
 Circus Maximus, 21
 Curia Iulia, 121
 Domus Aurea, 3, 11, 20, 26, 81, 83
 Esquiline Hill, 67, 68, 102
 Forum Iulium, 121
 Forum of Augustus, 104, 121, 225
 House of Augustus, 6, 109
 House of Livia, 106–109, 148, 183, 183–187, 190
 House of the Griffins, 161
 Palace of Domitian, 1–4
 Portico of Pompey, 101
 Porticus Metelli, 119, 121
 Porticus Octaviae, 121
 Porticus Philippi, 103
 Pyramid of Cestius, 150
 Regia, 122
 Saepta Iulia, 121
 Temple of Apollo Sosianus, 121
 Temple of Concord, 121
 Temple of Mars Ultor, 121, 224
 Temple of the Divine Julius Caesar, 121
 Theater of Pompey, 163, 219
 Thermae Agrippae, 121
 Tiber, 205
 Villa della Farnesina, 7, 147 *See also* Forum of Augustus; Villa della Farnesina
 Rome and Egypt, cultural ties, 110–112
 Romulus, 101, 102, 104, 224
 Roose, Pierre, 56
- scaenographia*. *See* scene paintings
 scale, 67, 69, 142, 156, 182, 223, 226
 Scaurus, Marcus Aemilius, 95, 96, 97, 122
 scene paintings, 159, 160, 163, 164, 166
 Schefold, Karl, 112
 Scopas, 120
 sculptor, 26, 37, 126, 192
 Second Style
 asymmetrical perspective, 161, 162
 House of the Labyrinth, 151
 conceit, 81, 141, 222
 frescoes, 106, 152
 at House of the Cryptoporticus, 78
 illusionism, 42, 52, 67, 69, 155
 murals, 98
 at Oplontis, 44
 perspectival immersion, 207
 transition to Third Style, 69
 viewer, relating to, 54
 Seeing-as, 153–154
 Seeing-in, 154
- Seleukos, 229
 self-reflexivity, 66, 230, 234
 semiotic, 49
 Septimius Severus (emperor), 71
 Serapio, 73, 80, 164
 Serapis, 72
 Severe Style, 222
 Sicily, 28, 116, 218
signa aena, 36, 144
 signatures, 22, 229
 Sikyon, 122
 Silen, 68, 149, 208
simulacrum, 61
 Siren, 207, 208
 Sopolis, 21
 space
 architectural, 3, 4, 134, 151
 pictorial, 42, 45, 54, 140, 148
spolia
 ancient vs. modern meaning, 205
 at Villa of Farnesina, 223, 224
spolia opima, 104, 224
 spoliation, of artworks, 28, 223
 Squire, Michael, 27
 Stabia, 12
 Stele of Hegeso, 170
 Stinson, Philipp, 162
 Stoichita, Victor, 55
 Strabo, 118, 128
 Studius (Ludius), 20, 25, 130
 style
 artistic, relation to time, 226–227 *See also* specific Styles
 substitution, 113, 195, 227, 229, 234
 Suetonius, 96, 97, 122
 sumptuary legislation, 123, 130
 Syracuse, 28, 113, 114
- tabula picta* problem, 145
tabula/tabella. *See* panel painting
 Tarentum, 28
 teleology, 221, 222, 227
 of art history, 230
 Temple and Cult Statue of Divus Iulius, 64
 temple inventories, categorical impositions, 73–74
 temporality, plural, 194
 Terence, 165
 terracotta plaque with portico, 220
 theater, 163 *See also* *periaktos*
 Theocritus, 31, 190
 Theon of Alexandria, 31
 Theophilos, 21, 129

- Theseus, 84, 199, 200
 Thetis, 60, 173, 174, 175
 Third Style, 42, 54, 81, 82, 87, 198
 Thisbe, 176
 time
 cyclical models, 221, 222
 linear models, 204, 221, 222, 223
 teleological model, 204
 temporal orientation, 204, 222
 Timomachus of Byzantium, 25
 transfer, between media, 233
 translation, 30, 31, 32, 33
 transparency, 52, 86, 127, 138
 transparency and opacity, 5, 7, 92, 138, 143, 157, 173
 Troy, 15, 103, 104, 224
 Tusculum, 125, 129
 Tyrannicide group, 192

 Vallois, René, 74, 75
 value of art, 179, 204
 Varro, Marcus Terentius, 108, 126–129, 164
 Velázquez, Diego, 56, 234
 Venus. *See* Aphrodite
 Venuti, Ridolfino, 38
 Vergil, 29–30, 31 *See also* *Aeneid* (Vergil)
 Vergina, 80
 Verres, Gaius, 116, 119, 122, 218, 223
 Vespasian, 20
 Vesuvius, eruption of, 1, 11, 13, 42
 Villa della Farnesina
 anachronism of, 205
 decorative schemes, 206, 207

 Egyptian motifs at, 214
 fictive panels of, 205, 206, 207, 208
 Greek panel paintings, as *spolia*, 223
 imitation and collection, 229
 line drawing, 233
 murals of, 205
 political interpretation, murals, 222, 223
 styles of painting, 208, 209, 210, 211, 213
 sacro-idyllic, 206, 208
 Vitruvius, 124, 127, 139, 159, 160, 164, 166
 on private luxury, 125
 Void, 146, 147

 wall paintings, Roman
 and Greek panel paintings, 9
 representation of representation in, 1
 Second Style of, 41–42, 77
 Weber, Karl, 12, 38
 Weinberg, Guido Kaschnitz von, 139, 140
 white-ground painting, 208, 209, 210, 227
 Winckelmann, Johann Joachim, 10, 17, 33, 180
 Herculaneum panels, approach to, 39–40
 Letter on the Herculaneum Discoveries, 11
 See also *History of the Art of Antiquity*
 Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 153 *See also* seeing-as
 Wollheim, Richard, 154 *See also* seeing-as;
 seeing-in
 Wood, Christopher S., 194
 Wyler, Stephanie, 207

 Zanker, Paul, 101, 124
 Zeus, 61, 182, 206, 209
 Zeuxis, 37, 193, 216

